

**Compassion, Community, Capital, and Crisis:
Neoliberalism and the Non-Profitization of Queer Social Movements**

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the expansion of the non-profit system in the US and its impact on the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) social movement. In 1960 there were 3,000 501c non-profits in the US. By 2000, that number had leapt to 1,569,572. By 2011, total assets held by non-profits grew to \$6.3 trillion, increasing by 106% in the past decade, far outpacing both state and business sector growth.¹ One feature of this explosion has been the literal incorporation of social movements into non-profits. This dissertation analyzes this proliferation, exploring non-profits as key sites from which to understand contemporary capitalism and the changing role of social movements in it.

The growth of the non-profit system coincides with and illustrates a profound shift in how the material needs of people living in poverty are – or are not – met. It offers a window into the demise of the social welfare state in the US and the rise of neoliberalism: the dominant political economic framework in the US that champions privatization, deregulation, and so-called “free” enterprise. Under this system, key social welfare provisions have been transferred from the state onto the non-profit sector, and consequently, more people must rely on non-profits in order to meet their most basic needs.

This dissertation examines the impact of “non-profitization” on LGBT social movements. In the context of the shifts detailed above, the modern LGBT movement has taken its present shape: a vast network of community centers, rights organizations, social service agencies, and other non-profits explicitly working in and for LGBT communities. This new array of institutions reflects a profound change in LGBT movement politics, from a critique of sexual norms and state regulation that reflected the radical politics of the 1960s and 1970s, to a fairly limited push for formal legal inclusion. *Compassion, Community, Capital, and Crisis* connects the rise of assimilationist queer politics focused on formal legal equality to the institutional location from which that politics is articulated: LGBT non-profits. The institutional form of queer social movements, I argue, structures the politics articulated from within them.

¹ The Urban Institute’s National Center for Charitable Statistics.

² Suzanne Pharr, Plenary Session, “The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the

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Introduction

*We, the Left, have been described as being weak, fractured, disorganized. I attribute that to three things: COINTELPRO. 501(c)(3). Capitalism.*²
– Susanne Pharr

*More insidious than the raw structural constraint exerted by the foundation/state/non-profit nexus is the way in which this new industry grounds an epistemology – literally, a way of knowing social change and resistance praxis – that is difficult to escape or rupture.*³
- Dylan Rodriguez

In June of 2013, timed to hit right before Pride events, the Ali Forney Center in New York City – the largest social service for LGBT homeless youth in the country – released a video to promote a fundraising collaboration with the gay-owned design house Nasty Pig. Nasty Pig donated t-shirts designed by gay celebrities like Alan Cumming, Michael Stipe, and Adam Lambert to be auctioned off to benefit the Center. In the video promoting this fundraiser, Carl Siciliano, the Executive Director of the Center, articulates a familiar explanatory narrative for queer youth homelessness – family rejection. According this narrative, the primary cause for queer youth homelessness is homophobia within, and rejection from, the family. “*Homophobia,*” he says, “*has a way of making children – teenagers – destitute. They come out and then they are put out.*”⁴ According to

² Suzanne Pharr, Plenary Session, “The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex” Conference, Santa Barbara, CA. Spring 2004.

³ Dylan Rodriguez, “The Political Logic of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex” in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, Ed. Incite! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge, Mass: South End Press, 2007). P. 31.

⁴ Carl Siciliano, “A Shred of Hope,” Video Fundraiser for the Ali Forney Center. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mV4bmU8JcO4>

Siciliano, the root cause of this *queer* kind of homelessness is homophobia – it literally is making children destitute.

Homophobia, of course, is *not* making children destitute. Being destitute is making children destitute. Racialized poverty, not homophobia, is the root cause of homelessness, including queer youth homelessness. This is certainly not to say that many queer youth who are homeless have fraught relationships with their families of origins, experience homophobia, and get put out. That can be the case for some folks, but it is only ever a piece of the story, and importantly, it doesn't explain *homelessness*, especially persistent homelessness. When a young person with access to resources gets put out, that doesn't necessarily translate into homelessness, and, when it does, that homelessness is not often lasting. Instead, for most queer youth experiencing homelessness, that homelessness is due to entire families and communities living in poverty, without access to affordable housing, trying to survive in the rubble of the failed social safety net, in which public housing, public hospitals, and public benefits have been decimated over the last forty years in favor of an expanding prison system and the shift towards temporary and tenuous labor in the service sector. But the family rejection narrative is important, insofar as it is a compelling story for Ali Forney's prime donor base: middle and upper income white gay and lesbian couples. In order to have that cash value, the narrative obscures the systemic political economic realities of racialized poverty in the US, and constructs *queer* youth homelessness as exceptional, separate from the figure of the *undeserving* poor so readily at hand.

For two years I worked in a queer youth non-profit in Chicago as a case manager, working with young people experiencing homelessness and housing instability, most

of whom were queer, many of whom were gender non-conforming, and the large majority of whom were young people of color. For those young people who had experienced family rejection, that was only ever one factor among many, and for many it wasn't a factor at all. What *were* factors – Chicago's crumbling public health and education systems, the destruction of 50,000 units of public housing, intense residential segregation and racialized policing, exclusion from labor markets, gentrification, and a punitive and policing public benefits system – are much less appealing to wealthy white gay donors, without whom organizations like the Ali Forney Center and The Broadway Youth Center, where I worked, would not exist.

This contradiction – between the complex systemic violences that structured reality for young people and the direct service staff who worked with them, and the simplistic and individualized narrative used to sell those services to wealthy donors – was merely one frustrating contradiction among many that make working in queer non-profits so maddening. I remember very clearly during my tenure at the Broadway Youth Center a staff meeting full of shared irritation about the neighborhood gay chamber of commerce organization's attempts to pressure the Chicago Police Department to install a "blue light" surveillance camera at the intersection where our drop-in space was located. There was amazing solidarity among the staff, who shared a recognition that this increased policing would make homeless queer youth less safe and their ability to negotiate hostile systems even more tenuous, and that it would have a differential impact on youth of color. I also remember the shame I felt hours later as I, while staffing the drop-in, interrupted a young person rolling her way past the food table, filling her paper plate, chatting with her friends, giving them shit, and told her to put one of the pieces of

pizza she grabbed back on the table so that everyone who came that afternoon would have something to eat. Me, a white college educated trans-masculine person reprimanding an African American trans woman, maybe sixteen, for “taking more than her share” – as if I, a white liberal arts college-educated trans guy, was not actually the person in that situation who had received more than my fair share. I remember trying to make a joke, to be as kind as one can be while policing the eating choices of someone else, to make it less humiliating and dehumanizing for that young person, but the power dynamic was stark, and there was no room for humor. Me, with my belly full, telling this person to leave drop-in hungry, knowing that that those two pieces of pizza were all she would eat that day, perhaps all she’d eaten in days. And she looked at me incredulously, like “are you really doing this?” – but that was my job. Of course, I don’t know what she was thinking or feeling – this may have been an injustice that felt commonplace to her by that point in her life. But *I* felt it, whether or not she did. It certainly made clear to me that though my job was many things, uncomplicatedly “good” it was not.

To go from solidarity around shared resistance to the policing of young people to actually policing an individual young person was a devastating moment. It felt familiar after my years working in non-profits, though, the feeling that rose up in my chest when the awareness crept in that the work that I *wanted* to be doing – making the world a more just place – felt very far from the work I *was* doing – helping sort through wreckage, helping order chaos, witnessing, watching, trying to resist, or even just see, the systems *that I was a part of* that are intended to make poor people feel less than, like objects of pity, of punishment, of control. And, of course, on bad days, I knew I was actually the agent of those systems, making people into objects. I was struggling to grapple with

the fallout of the collapse of social possibility in the lives of poor queer youth of color, and the only resources made available to me by the organization I worked for were the bare minimum necessary to sustain life – some food, a shower, a pair of underwear, a blanket, referrals to shelters – and “life skills” programs that promised individual solutions to systemic problems.

This dissertation emerged as an attempt to reckon with the desperate sadness I, and those around me, experience in LGBT non-profits – and also the profound attachment we nonetheless have for them; to grapple with how these spaces and organizations eat people up – staff, youth, clients, volunteers – but also the investment we retain, the belief and hope and love for the people, the relationships, the solidarity, the *idea* of community, and the vision of justice articulated there. These two examples – the reality of working with queer homeless youth and the stories told about them to raise money – illustrate the disjuncture between mainstream articulations of LGBT community centered on privatization and consumption, a narrative LGBT non-profits must speak to in order to raise money, and the profound social crisis experienced by the queer people who often constitute those organizations, whether clients, participants, or front-line staff.

Compassion, Community, Capital, and Crisis connects the rise of assimilationist queer politics focused on formal legal equality to the institutional location from which that politics is articulated: LGBT non-profits. The institutional form of queer social movements, I argue, informs and structures the politics articulated from within them. LGBT non-profits are ideal locations from which to theorize both the expansion of the non-profit system as well as transformations in queer politics. It is during the period of rapid proliferation of non-profits, beginning in the late 1960s, that the modern LGBT

movement has taken its present shape: a vast network of community centers, rights organizations, social service agencies, and other non-profits explicitly working in and for LGBT communities. LGBT non-profits produce and police ideas about queer community, and through the idea of community people tell stories about difference and find themselves to be connected – or not – to one another. In the example with which I began, for instance, the narrative mobilized by the Ali Forney center produces not just the queer homeless youth as someone victimized by homophobia instead of poverty or racism, but also the donor, the person who is hailed, who imagines themselves to be connected to this young person but not *that* young person. This project investigates how people within LGBT non-profits grapple with the contradictions between the radical imaginary of queer social movements and their institutionalized iterations, and what this means for queer politics.

Scholars over the last twenty years, from Cathy Cohen to Lisa Duggan, have decried the dominance of what they term “single issue politics” in queer social movements: the focus on the part of LGBT movement organizations on issues that are solely “gay” – legal equality, hate crimes, military service, for example – at the expense of issues that affect the majority of LGBT people, who also occupy other marginalized identities, issues like immigration reform, universal healthcare, progressive taxation, or education policy.⁵ They argue that the only people for whom specifically and solely “gay issues” like marriage are the foremost concern are those already most privileged within

⁵ See Cathy Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics”, *GLQ* 3 (1997): 437-465, Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*, (New York: Beacon, 2003). LGBT movement organizers have also long expressed this limitation. See, for example, Urvashi Vaid, *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of Gay and Lesbian Liberation*, (New York: Anchor, 1996).

the LGBT community, often wealthy white gay men, and to a lesser extent wealthy white lesbians. That the issues deemed most important by those most privileged within the LGBT community have come to be so exclusively dominant is, I argue, a function of the structure of the movement itself, the non-profit system. These privileged members of the community are the “major donors” that LGBT non-profits court, appeal to as “leaders,” and to whom they are therefore beholden. The single-issue politics of the contemporary LGBT movement is a function of economic dependence, and that relationship of dependence is, as I will show throughout the dissertation, a core feature of the non-profit system. The structural constraints of the non-profit system are key mechanisms through which the wealthiest members of the LGBT community have come to exercise such outsized influence in the political direction of the movement.

This dissertation illustrates how the non-profit system functions as a technology of governance, operating through four distinct but overlapping discursive orientations: compassion, community, capital, and crisis. Each of these valences has a particular resonance in queer social movements. *Compassion*, which lies at the heart of the US charity model - a system of control over populations made surplus by capitalism – grafts older disciplinary models of poverty governance onto new approaches to issues like queer youth homelessness, HIV/AIDS, sex work – even ideas of queer community itself. Compassion has always been a defining logic of poverty governance in the US, and throughout US history the figure of the “deserving” poor is used to rationalize the abandonment and policing of those deemed “undeserving.” In this sense, compassion has always served as a disciplinary form of power, directed at particular bodies – poor people, immigrants, unwed mothers, the homeless, and the sexually deviant, among

others – intended to reform, control, manage, and police behaviors and moral postures. Of course, as scholars and activists have shown again and again, compassion is a stance specifically intended *not* to disrupt current configurations of power, but rather to ameliorate the harm it causes while simultaneously entrenching the wealth of the ruling class. Compassion, I argue, has seen a resurgence through the non-profitization of poverty management since 1970, and, as such, has had a profound – but largely unremarked upon – impact on queer politics.

The impact of disciplinary logics of compassion has been buttressed and augmented by the logic of *community*, a paradigmatic discourse of late capitalism – and of contemporary LGBT movements – which conceptualizes non-profits as sites of togetherness and shared identity, in which difference falls away. Community has been a particularly salient framework of neoliberal multiculturalism, where political power is often exercised through consumption, and queer people have been reconfigured as target niche markets. Community is not just what Nikolas Rose and Soo Ah Kwon refer to as an “affirmative” form of governmentality, however, since producing “the community” also produces threatening others who fall outside it.⁶ For LGBT non-profits, the techniques of hailing and mobilizing queer community rely on the policing of racialized others, especially poor queer and gender-non-conforming people of color. Thus for contemporary queer movements, community is both affirmative – fostering a sense of unity through consumption, desire, and the articulation of uniquely LGBT identities and issues – and negative: the reliance on urban policing, gentrification, exclusion, and segregation. In this sense, community is what Foucault describes as a “biopolitical” form

⁶ See Soo Ah Kwon, *Uncivil Youth: Race, Activism, and Affirmative Governmentality* and Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*.

of governance: the power – directed at the social, rather than at individual bodies – to increase the life chances of some while “exposing [others] to death, increasing the risk of death for some people.”⁷ The dual nature of community – both affirmative and policing – is what Jasbir Puar calls a “bio-necro collaboration,” directing some bodies towards life and other, queerly racialized bodies, towards death. It is within “the interstices of life and death” that I locate LGBT non-profits: an apparatus that produces, disciplines, and regulates particular queer subjects.⁸ Non-profits, then, operate as a form of hybrid statecraft, a critical relay in circuits of governance that knit the disciplinary technologies of the welfare state to the biopolitical scope of the neoliberal security state.

Connected to the logics of compassion and community is a contested discursive and material orientation towards *capital* within contemporary LGBT non-profits, in which the non-profit system is structured to consolidate and upwardly redistribute wealth, even as actors within some queer non-profits actively work against it. Despite the work of activists within queer non-profits to grapple with and contest the profound inequalities caused by racialized capitalism, non-profits themselves increasingly adopt business-like structures, use corporate-style management techniques and language, and operate according to increasingly market-driven principles. Although numerous scholars have critiqued the consumption-oriented turn in queer politics, less attention has been paid to the degree to which LGBT non-profits increasingly articulate queer identity and issues through the corporate language of logic models, return on investment, efficiency, and

⁷ Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976*. P. 256.

⁸ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007). P. xii.

branding.⁹ LGBT non-profits offer a unique window onto late capitalism: within queer non-profits, capitalism is both more and less complete than is often imagined. Non-profits are certainly not outside capitalism, as some naively imagine, but neither are they wholly corporate: they reveal the fractures, inconsistencies, and contradictions of advanced capitalism, even as they document its ascendancy. Central to this project is recognizing the degree to which market logics are resisted and refracted on a daily basis, in small and large ways, in the actual practice of capitalism in non-profits. Further, non-profits also offer a somewhat contradictory case study of state power under advanced capitalism. Rather than reflecting a withdrawal of the state, as many scholars of neoliberalism have theorized, non-profits instead illustrate the expansion of state power through an increasingly nodal, disconnected, and fragmented web of non-profit locations, that are, nonetheless, sites of policing and discipline.¹⁰

Finally, this dissertation explores multiple levels and discourses of *crisis* operating within non-profits, as organizations struggle to deal with the social and economic catastrophe produced by advanced capitalism: crumbling public infrastructure, militarized urban policing, segregation, and entrenched and expanding inequality among the people seeking their services. Meanwhile, the structure of the non-profit itself is perpetually in crisis, dependent on an untenable funding structure based on a gift economy. The financial structure of the non-profit sector at large is based on donations, monetary gifts predicated on the largess of wealthy donors, donors often unwilling to fund the long-term systemic changes that are necessary to truly address the social crisis

⁹ See, for instance, Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Democracy* and Alexandra Chasin, *Selling Out: The Gay and Lesbian Movement Goes to Market*.

¹⁰ See, for example, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

with which non-profits contend – changes that might disrupt the system of power that creates such wealth for those donors. These structural factors imbue non-profits with a constant sense of impending devastation, as managers hustle for the next grant or major donor, as front line staff try to find time to deal with their grief and trauma amidst pressing need, as clients piece together a web of inadequate services, and as clients, staff, volunteers, and community members alike invest in the non-profit the hope they have for another, more just, world.

Each of these frameworks is material as well as discursive, and is built on a series of implicit and explicit *affective transactions*: the exchange of a wealthy donor’s guilt for money, for instance, or the expectation of a client’s gratefulness in exchange for services. Throughout the dissertation, I explore the *feelings* built into the non-profit structure – shame, fear, hope, desire, frustration, isolation, connection – and analyze how those feelings inform queer politics, how they inform the LGBT movement’s approach to poverty, to the state, and, importantly, its understanding of itself. A key intervention of this project, therefore, is centralizing affect – the political economy of feelings – in understanding the non-profitization of queer social movements. Not only reliant on histories of compassion and charity, non-profits are actually *legally mandated* to operate according to explicitly affective logics: to qualify for 501(c)(3) non-profit status, an organization must operate for “charitable purposes” to promote “the common good” and “in the public interest.”¹¹ In what seems like surprisingly imprecise language for the tax

¹¹ Internal Revenue Code, Section 501 subsection C lists 28 different kinds of organizations or exemptions from federal taxes, including, but not limited to, federal credit unions, fraternal organizations, labor organizations, the National Football League (oddly) – but not its pension, mutual life insurance or retirement funds “of a purely local character,” various kinds of local utility cooperatives, and many kinds of trusts. 11

code, these organizations and their relationship to individuals and to the state are reliant on, and produce, a set of “common sense” assumptions about compassion, deservingness, community, and citizenship. These discourses are made materially real in and through non-profits, imbricated as they are in relationships of power and circuits of capital.

In this work I am utilizing the insights and tools offered by scholars contributing to what Patricia Clough has termed the “affective turn” in social theory, much of it building on the pioneering work of Raymond Williams, who argued that scholars must be attentive to “structures of feeling,” analyzing “meanings and values as they are actually lived and felt.”¹² In analyzing the circulation of affect with queer non-profit spaces, Ana

However, the organizations most commonly referred to as “non-profits,” and those analyzed in this project, are covered in subsection 3 – what are, therefore, often called 501(c)(3)s. Subsection 3 covers two distinct kinds of organizations, both of which I will address: public charities and private foundations. The Code states:

(3) Corporations, and any community chest, fund, or foundation, organized and operated exclusively for religious, charitable, scientific, testing for public safety, literary, or educational purposes, or to foster national or international amateur sports competition (but only if no part of its activities involve the provision of athletic facilities or equipment), or for the prevention of cruelty to children or animals, no part of the net earnings of which inures to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual, no substantial part of the activities of which is carrying on propaganda, or otherwise attempting, to influence legislation (except as otherwise provided in subsection (h)), and which does not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.

¹² Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). P. 132. There is an important distinction between the work of Raymond Williams, which I follow, and some contemporary scholarship on affect, most notably that of Brian Massumi. In particular Massumi, in his book *Parables of the Virtual*, argues that affect should be differentiated from emotion, which should further be differentiated from feeling. Massumi understands affect as the capacity to act, a capacity that originates in the body and exists on two levels: one is simply an intensity, the potential of disruption, and the other is semiotic, is narrative, is social. In other words, according to Massumi¹²

Agathangelou, Tamara Spira, and Daniel Bassichis' concept of "affective economies" is particularly helpful. Affective economies, they argue, index "the various ways we become invested emotionally, libidinally, and erotically in global capitalism's mirages of safety and inclusion."¹³ Rather than simply analyzing the historical and political changes that have enabled the non-profitization of queer non-profits, this dissertation investigates how those changes are felt, contested, refracted, lived with. I am not interested in celebrating the "good works" of non-profits, nor am I interested in rehearsing a declension narrative about the uncontested domination of neoliberalism. This project instead exposes the murky world of practice, of complicity, and of complex personhood – it lives in the world of committed people doing the best they can, and the structures in which they participate, rail against, ignore, and make do.

Neoliberalism and the Rise of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex

and those scholars who follow him, affect is both "before and other than meaning." In other words – and this is, in particular, what I find to be problematic with this theorization – Massumi understands affect to be "presocial." I join Sara Ahmed in resisting this splitting, and more broadly in resisting the idea that something is, by virtue of originating in the body, prior to meaning or the social. Instead, Ahmed argues that we "shouldn't look for emotions 'in' ... bodies. Emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others." Following Ahmed, I use an approach that places affect, emotion, and feeling back within a terrain of contested social meaning. See Brian Massumi, *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002; Patricia Clough and Jean Halley, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

¹³ Anna Agathangelou, Daniel Bassichis, and Tamara Spira, "Intimate Investments: Homonormativity, Global Lockdown, and the Seductions of Empire" in *Radical History Review* Issue 100 (Winter 2008). p. 122.

In 1960 there were approximately 3,000 501c non-profits in the US. By 2000, that number had risen to 1,569,572.¹⁴ In 2011, there were 2.3 million non-profits operating in the US, with the largest sector, public charities, holding \$2.71 trillion in assets. The total assets held by non-profits increased by 106% in just ten years, from 1998 to 2008, reflecting a level of growth that far outpaces both the state and business sector. Non-profits accounted for 9.2% of all wages and salaries paid in the United States in 2010. Further, charitable giving totaled \$298.42 billion, and 26.8% of adults in the US volunteer. *Giving USA* estimates those volunteer hours to be worth an estimated \$296.2 billion, equal to the dollars contributed.¹⁵

This massive expansion has been facilitated by a wholesale transformation in the way the needs of people living in poverty are, and are not, met. This transformation is one feature of neoliberalism, a set of economic and social policies championing fiscal austerity, deregulation, privatization, and “free trade” that was articulated in the early Cold War by followers of Austrian political philosopher Friedrich von Hayek – among them American economist Milton Friedman – and rose to global ascendency in the 1980s with the Reagan administration in the US and the Thatcher administration in the UK. Neoliberalism continues to be the dominant political and social framework of both the left and the right in the global north, and through multilateral organizations like the World Bank, World Trade Organization, and International Monetary Fund, neoliberal

¹⁴ These statistics are gathered and disseminated by The Urban Institute’s National Center for Charitable Statistics, and include primarily information from the IRS, with whom most, but not all, non-profits must register. Those non-profits with a budget of less than \$5000, as well as religious congregations, are not required to register with the IRS.

¹⁵ As cited by National Center for Charitable Statistics in the *2012 Non-Profit Almanac* 44

reforms have been coercively instituted in many global south economies through structural adjustment schemes.

Throughout the project, though I do use the term neoliberalism narrowly to refer to particular policy frameworks, I am most concerned with neoliberalism as a way of seeing the world, an orientation, and a set of common-sense assumptions about capital, consumption, the state, and inequality. According to Foucault, American neoliberalism is not simply a policy choice, but a “whole way of being and thinking”¹⁶ in which the market is generalized to become a “principle of intelligibility”¹⁷ through which subjects are produced and made meaningful. Though the faith-based appeals to charity that I describe below are often understood as examples of the Christian moralism of neoconservatives – George W. Bush’s “compassionate conservatism” for example – to the extent that appeals to charity serve as a pretext for the erosion of public services, they reflect what Wendy Brown calls “neo-liberal political rationality.”¹⁸ For Brown, this rationality “exceeds particular positions on particular issues” about which those on the right and those on the left might disagree, and instead forms the very horizon of possibility for the enunciation of “issues” and “positions.”¹⁹ Therefore, while Reagan and Clinton, for example, certainly differed on particular policy approaches to poverty, they shared the fundamental framework of neoliberalism.

It is in this context that we must place the massive expansion of the non-profit system. Although initially spurred by Great Society funding in the 1960s, the exponential

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978-1979* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 218.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹⁸ Wendy Brown, “Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy,” *Theory and Event*, Volume 7, Issue 1, (2003).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

expansion of the non-profit system in the 1980s and 1990s reflects the demise of the social safety net in the US, and the discursive tools used to facilitate it. At the same time that right-wing politicians were mobilizing narratives demonizing poor women of color as welfare queens gaming the system, a parallel discursive project championed volunteerism, charity, and community togetherness as alternatives to the bloated welfare state. Beginning in the mid-1960s with Barry Goldwater's failed presidential run, and solidifying during the Nixon administration, politicians mobilized powerful anti-welfare rhetoric demonizing people living in poverty and weakening support for civil rights movements by rhetorically linking urban civil unrest with crime, while, at the same time, underwriting massive spending cuts to social welfare programs.²⁰ Instead of government programs, they advocated volunteerism, private charity, and faith- and community-based "solutions" to the dislocations and inequality caused by advancing capitalism.

In order to bolster support for vast reductions in the social safety net – a safety net on which the majority of those who rely are white – fear-based hysteria about lazy welfare cheats and bloated government bureaucracy was not enough. Buttressing this narrative was an affirmative nationalism centered on volunteerism and community. On the occasion of the centennial of the United Way, Reagan articulated this narrative:

Since earliest times, we Americans have joined together to help each other and to strengthen our communities. Our deep-rooted spirit of caring, of neighbor helping neighbor, has become an American trademark – and an American way of life. Over the years, generous and inventive people have created an ingenious network of voluntary organizations to give help where help is needed.²¹

²⁰ Lee Bernstein, *America is the Prison* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

²¹ Ronald Reagan, *Proclamation 5590: United Way Centennial 1887-1987*, December 10, 1986.

And to a great extent, this discursive project has been wildly successful, with the non-profit system largely escaping critical scrutiny – albeit with some important exceptions, with which I will deal at length.

In her book *Sweet Charity: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*, Janet Poppendieck argues that the offloading of core social safety net provisions onto the non-profit sector “is at once a *symptom* and a *cause* of our society’s failure to face up to and deal with the erosion of equality.”²² The expansion of the non-profit system, she argues,

works pervasively on a cultural level by serving as a sort of “moral safety valve”; it reduces the discomfort evoked by visible destitution in our midst by creating the illusion of effective action and offering us myriad ways of participating in it. It creates a culture of charity that normalizes destitution and legitimates personal generosity as a response to major social and economic dislocation.²³

Further, she argues, this new array of small, disconnected, underfunded non-profit organizations is wholly inadequate to the task of providing the kinds of services that the centralized state-run welfare programs once offered, and their maintenance “absorbs the attention and energy of many of the people most concerned about the poor, distracting them from the larger issues of distributional politics.”²⁴ It is not surprising, then, that “poverty grows deeper as our charitable responses to it multiply.”²⁵

The proliferation of non-profits dovetails with waning public approval for direct benefits for people living in poverty, meaning that non-profit organizations can only provide “stuff” – food, case management, services – but not cash benefits, just at the moment when public cash benefits are slashed. Non-profits are regarded as bastions of

²² Janet Poppendieck, *Sweet Charity: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement* (New York: Penguin, 1998), P. 5.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

good works and volunteerism, while welfare is demonized as bloated and habit-forming. National conversations about income redistribution, conversations that had come briefly to the fore in the 1960s, have faded into the distance, while people living in poverty have even fewer resources to maintain their tenuous grasp on life.

Jennifer Wolch describes this new constellation of organizations – what she terms the shadow state – that rose in the wake of welfare state reorganization: “a para-state apparatus comprised of multiple voluntary sector organizations, administered outside of traditional democratic politics and charged with major collective responsibilities previously shouldered by the public sector.”²⁶ One defining characteristic of this new array of organizations is the degree to which it is influenced by corporate wealth, both in its reliance on private philanthropy and through direct funding by corporations and corporate foundations. This distinctly neoliberal feature allows corporations to cleanse their image through support for “good causes” and to appeal to particular identity groups, as evidenced by corporate support for Pride festivals as a bid to appear “gay friendly” to consumers even as their policies make life even more precarious for their poorly paid workers.²⁷

²⁶ Jennifer R Wolch, *The Shadow State: Government and the Voluntary Sector in Transition* (New York: The Foundation Center, 1990), p. xvi.

²⁷ An ideal example of this occurred in 2010 when LGBT activists called for a boycott of Target because of that corporation’s \$150,000 donation in support of Tom Emmer’s Minnesota gubernatorial campaign. Emmer, a conservative Republican, supported so-called “Right to Work” anti-union legislation, as well as corporate tax subsidies attractive to big business. Through social media, former Target customers told of their return of Target merchandise and intention to stage a boycott until the corporation ceased to support anti-gay candidates, eventually prompting the retailer to issue an apology. Even as Target fights for anti-union legislation and regressive taxation, they fund LGBT organizations and have a significant presence at LGBT Pride events in Minneapolis – so much so that Pride attendees are often seen wearing a rainbow colored version of the iconic Target bull’s-eye brand on their cheeks after wandering past the Target booth. 18

Dylan Rodriguez terms this the Non-Profit Industrial Complex (NPIC): “a set of symbiotic relationships that link together political and financial technologies of state and owning-class proctorship and surveillance over public intercourse, including and especially emergent progressive and leftist movements, since about the mid-1970s.”²⁸ The expansion of the NPIC does not, however, represent a retreat of the state. On the contrary, as I show throughout, the NPIC is a vehicle for the expansion, rather than retraction, of state power, dispersed throughout the social body. The NPIC legitimizes structural social inequality both morally and materially, and works alongside more overtly policing institutions like prisons, urban schools, and the low wage labor markets to manage, direct, and discipline bodies.

From Reagan’s Task Force on Private Sector Initiatives, intended to promote private sector investment in social service, to George H.W. Bush’s famous call for a “thousand points of light” to promote service and volunteerism in his 1989 Inaugural Address, to Clinton’s focus on “public-private partnerships,” Samantha King argues:

Four successive federal administrations have sought to establish the organizational and subjective conditions through which to reshape relations between the state and the individual. They have done this not simply by rolling back the public welfare system with the hope that the charitable impulses of citizens and corporations will flourish but by helping to create the techniques, strategies, and programs - frequently in partnership with non-profit and business entities – aimed at producing volunteer and philanthropist citizens.²⁹

In this new neoliberal resurgence, volunteer and philanthropist citizens understand non-profits to be fundamentally spaces of community. Despite this new affective orientation,

²⁸ Rodriguez, “The Political Logic of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex,” in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*. Eds. Incite! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge, Mass: South End Press, 2007), p. 21-22.

²⁹ Samantha King, *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), p. xxviii.

the non-profit as a technology is structured by an earlier affective orientation, compassion. Because this history haunts current non-profit formations, it is worth exploring the prehistory of the contemporary NPIC, investigating the relationship between settler colonialism, early capitalism, state power, and the establishment of a distinct, and distinctly American, voluntary sector.

“Repressive Benevolence”: Compassion and the Disciplining of Difference

The origins of our charitable institutions are integrally connected with a vision of repression over those deemed different, dangerous, or ‘deviant.’ ... Behind the philanthropist always lurked the soldier and the settler.³⁰

- David Wagner

Nonprofits are one arena of legitimate and public identity in which otherwise very private fortunes and families can establish an enduring interest. ... The non-profit sector, protected by tax exemption, is the permanent home of organized old wealth in American society.³¹

- Clifford Marcus

At the center of the development of US capitalism, state power, and national identity are genocide and slavery. And at the center of slavery and genocide, we find the missions, voluntary organizations, and other charities. In his book *What’s Love Got to Do With It*, David Wagner traces charity as a “moral technology” that functioned alongside military violence for disciplining American Indians.³² Missions to “civilize” Native Americans were key activities of a wide range of religious, and later secular, voluntary organizations, organizations which later turned these same technologies on other “deviant” populations such as immigrants and single mothers. Wagner notes that without

³⁰ David Wagner, *What’s Love Got To Do With It? A Critical Look at American Charity* (New York: The New Press, 2000), p. 5. Emphasis mine.

³¹ Clifford Marcus, *Lives in Trust*, quoted in Wagner, p. 109.

³² Wagner, p. 21.

organizations like the “Friends of the Indians movement and the massive investment of all Christian churches in Indian resocialization, the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] might have been a different instrument of power.”³³ Under the cover of “doing good” those organizations were able to undertake a kind of violence that might have otherwise aroused resistance from voters or lawmakers. “While most colonizers wanted the Indian’s *land*,” Wagner notes, “the repressive philanthropists also demanded their *souls* and their *culture*.”³⁴ The overtly moralizing tone and the discourses of racial difference deployed in benevolent societies’ undertakings towards American Indians were incorporated into charitable institutions targeting poor whites, and ultimately made their way into federal poverty policy.

Wagner and historian Peter Dobkin Hall note that early American approaches to poverty policy differed significantly from English “Poor Laws,” which provided direct aid. Informed by the civilizing missions targeting Native Americans, Wagner argues that colonial approaches to poverty focused on spiritual uplift rather than tangible benefits. Unlike the vague acknowledgement of entrenched class inequality reflected in English Poor Laws, in the colonial United States poverty is associated with personal moral failure; instead of cash benefits, coaching and instruction on the ways of right living is offered, thus creating an “American” form of poverty management: wholly more judgmental, moralistic, and individualized. Cotton Mather, informed by missions proselytizing to American Indians, entreated his congregants to “always bear in mind that charity to the *souls* of men is the highest form of benevolence.”³⁵ Mather went further, in

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Mather quoted in Bremner, *American Philanthropy*, p. 12.

fact, and demanded that those with charitable inclinations use caution, because “giving wisely is therefore an even greater obligation than giving generously; and withholding alms to the undeserving as needful and essentially benevolent as bestowing them on the deserving.”³⁶ The belief that poverty is essentially a moral and spiritual failing came to influence greatly both the development of early capitalism and the state’s approaches to its management, underwriting a patchwork system of alms and charity mixed with moral uplift as the common-sense and correct way of organizing care in the US.

These moralizing technologies, what Wagner calls “repressive benevolence,” privileged what was called indoor relief – institutionalization – over outdoor relief – direct aid received without giving up autonomy. Working class people, especially with the advent of universal white male suffrage under Jackson, were vocal in their demands for outdoor relief, and as their political power increased, many major cities offered direct aid to the poor. Although often we think of those who work with the poor as “liberal,” charity leaders of this era favored the elite and advocated institutionalization and moral uplift over direct aid. By the end of the 19th century, once institutionalization became logistically untenable, aid was given through “friendly visits,” “a system of surveillance and scrutiny over the poor through visitation that would shape and mold their behavior rather than merely provide material aid.”³⁷ French writer Jacques Donzelot argues that in the early twentieth century, some degree of aid to the working classes became accepted throughout Western society only in exchange for what he calls “mandatory tutelage,” in which “submission to instruction and surveillance by social personnel” is required, and

³⁶ Mather quoted in Wagner, p. 44.

³⁷ Wagner, p. 49.

“thus the denial of the prerogative to freely choose habits, associates, and pleasures.”³⁸

These technologies are still widely used in the form of home visits, and the homeless and domestic violence sheltering industry clearly has its roots in the system of indoor relief.

The individualizing and moralizing approaches of charity were due in large part to the development of private philanthropy during the Progressive Era, beginning in the 1890s with the publication of Carnegie’s *Gospel of Wealth*, in which he called for proactive philanthropy. He wrote: “The best means of benefitting the community is to place within its reach the ladders upon which the aspiring can rise.”³⁹ Carnegie believed that outright charity, however, encouraged “the slothful, the drunken, the unworthy,” and that the responsibility for addressing poverty must lie with men of industry. During this same period, Rockefeller, who shared Carnegie’s zeal for philanthropy, was soon overwhelmed with requests for aid to his Rockefeller foundation, a \$100 million endowment for the “betterment of mankind.” He hired staff to implement the principle of “scientific giving,” and as the legal structure for the foundation became clearer, the modern foundation – with its open-ended endowment, gifts to organizations rather than direct involvement, and staff rather than direct donor control – was born. The first foundation of this type was the Russell Sage Foundation, chartered in 1907 for the “permanent improvement of social conditions.”⁴⁰ These industrialists intended to create a “private sector alternative to socialism,” one that would buttress the social system that produced their wealth, but ameliorate the most devastating impacts of its accumulation.⁴¹ These foundations had and retain important additional functions – they are fundamentally

³⁸ Donzelot, quoted in Wagner, p. 60

³⁹ Andrew Carnegie, “Wealth,” June 1889.

⁴⁰ Dobkin Hall, p. 47.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51

tax shelters, in which vast private fortunes are spared taxation, and thus public direction over their distribution. Contemporary foundations are required to give out only 5% of their holdings in the form of charitable contributions – far less than the rate of taxation to which those fortunes would otherwise be subject. Thus, exempt from taxation, these private fortunes accumulate in value and are used to great effect in targeted social manipulation.

As Dobkin Hall notes, however, one of the seeming contradictions of the Progressive Era is that the entrenched power of industrialist elites co-existed alongside populist anti-big business rhetoric and increasing political might of the working class. Dobkin Hall describes the presidential race in 1912 between Taft, Wilson, and Roosevelt, as each came out more strongly than the next against “the interests,” articulating the populist fear that the fortunes of wealthy industrialists would be used to influence public policy. Theodore Roosevelt is famous for saying, in reference to Rockefeller, that “no amount of charity in spending such fortunes can compensate in any way for the misconduct in acquiring them.”⁴² A combination of militant trade-unionism, populism, socialism, and later the Great Depression forced political leaders to some aspects of a social welfare state, much to the distaste of philanthropists and charity leaders. These public gains, however, were short-lived, as in the build-up to WWII, business leaders like John Foster Dulles were welcomed back into the fold, leading big business to have an important voice in crafting post-war social and economic policy. As a public welfare state rose and waned, the private alternative only increased in power.

⁴² Quoted in Dobkin Hall, p. 48.

Even during Johnson's War on Poverty, the programs of the Great Society reflected the preferences of big charity more so than they established an enduring welfare state. One of the lasting legacies of the Great Society is government funding for community-based organizations in the form of block grants. Instead of centralized public social services, government provided partial funding to private organizations, outsourcing the services demanded by social movements. "*We'll give you a tiny bit of money and you can volunteer and pay yourself a small salary and then donate it back to the organization to keep it running.*" Not a welfare state at all, then, but what Loïc Wacquant calls a "charitable state": "limited, fragmentary, ... informed by a moralistic and moralizing conception of poverty," and "subcontracted to private and non-profit agencies, which distribute and administer [resources] in the name of the national collectivity."⁴³ This intricate and unwieldy public-private mesh is, Jacob Hacker argues, "dedicated to preserving the private tilt of US social policy."⁴⁴

Throughout the history of philanthropy and organized charity, actors at various points along the political spectrum have critiqued the power held by these private entities. Only a few years after the Russell Sage foundation was founded in 1907, the Wash Commission, in 1916, issued a report calling foundations a "grave menace" that concentrated political and social power in promoting an ideology and public policy favorable to big business. In 1959, the Senate Finance Committee decided to liberalize the tax code and allow unlimited deductions for charitable contributions. The dissenting minority wrote in their minority report:

⁴³ Loïc, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009) p. 42-45.

⁴⁴ Jacob Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State: The Battle over Public and Private Social Benefits in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 3. 25

The tax base is being dangerously eroded by ... tax exempt trusts and foundations. Not only is the tax base being eroded, but even more harmful social and political consequences may result from concentrating, and holding in a few hands and in perpetuity, control over large fortunes and business enterprises. The attendant inequities resulting from the tax treatment of contributions, particularly in the form of capital, to foundations are being magnified daily.⁴⁵

In fact, one of the only major differences between the contemporary NPIC and this earlier incarnation of the “charitable state” is that throughout its history organized charity and big philanthropy have been mistrusted by the working class, a target of social movements, despised and contested by socialists and unions. One key intention of this project is to investigate the profound impacts that the “moral technologies” of charity that are *built into* the non-profit system are having on queer social movements, now that social movements are literally incorporated into the non-profit form.

“In the Shadow of the Shadow State”: The Non-Profitization of Social Movements

The US state has found in its coalition with the NPIC a far less spectacular, generally demilitarized, and still highly effective apparatus of political discipline and repression that (to this point) has not provoked a significant mass of opposition or political outrage.⁴⁶
- Dylan Rodriguez

The massive expansion of the non-profit system in the US since 1960 has had a substantial impact on social movements, as activist organizations incorporate into the non-profit structure and are pulled into the technologies of power carried within this “private alternative to socialism.” In *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*, Robert Allen documents the powerful effect of the Ford Foundation in shifting Black

⁴⁵ Dobkin Hall, p. 70.

⁴⁶ Rodriguez, p. 29.

revolutionary organizations towards civic engagement and community economic development. According to Allen, in 1967 the Ford Foundation awarded a Harlem-based think tank \$500,000 to conduct “civil rights fellowships,” and ultimately focused on funding a Congress on Racial Equity (CORE) chapter in Cleveland in order to “calm” racial tension in that city. Ford funded a voter registration and education drive as well as a youth leadership program intended, according to a CORE report, “to identify and train urban ghetto youth in those ... skills which can serve as an alternative to frustration and violence.”⁴⁷ Robert Allen notes that, according to the director of the youth leadership program, its intent was to “show that ‘the legitimate hostilities and aggression of black youth’ could be ‘programmed’ into socially acceptable channels.”⁴⁸ And with the election of Carl Stokes as mayor, the first African American mayor of a major American city, and due in large part to Ford-funded voter registration drives, “racial tensions” in Cleveland were indeed eased, though not through substantive change in the underlying systemic causes of that tension, but by greater integration into existing systems of power.

Critics of the NPIC argue that its expansion during the later movement era was in fact a backlash against those revolutionary movements, an attempt by big business and the state – through mechanisms like the Ford Foundation – to co-opt and redirect radical social protest. Dylan Rodriguez argues that expansion of the non-profit system has functioned alongside more visible repressive policing technologies to restore and safeguard white supremacy in the face of Black and Brown power movements.

According to Rodriguez, “the spectacle of Hooverite repression obscures the broader –

⁴⁷ Quoted in Robert Allen, “Black Awakening in Capitalist America,” *The Revolution Will not be Funded*, Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, Eds. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007), p. 57.

⁴⁸ Philip Carter, Quoted in Allen, p. 57.

and far more important – convergence of state and philanthropic forces in the absorption of progressive social change struggles that defined this era and its current legacies.”⁴⁹

Funders have material power over what kinds of organizing and programs can be funded and what can't, but they also wield considerable discursive power to set the limits of “common sense” ideas about social change.

The stifling effect of the non-profit system is not merely limited to the sector's historic and resurgent charity function, although the transfer of social services from the state onto former movement organizations has had a significant impact. According to sociologist Stanley Aronowitz,

One of the key mechanisms for transforming social movements from independent adversaries of the state to collaborators is the service contract. ... Once militant groups... find themselves caught in the contradiction of the welfare state, ... [becoming] adjunct[s] of state and local governments seeking to enhance their own legitimacy... like antipoverty groups and other community organizations since the 1960s, [they are] effectively demobilized by these relationships.⁵⁰

Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the non-profitization of the domestic violence movement in the US throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Activists like Incite! Women of Color Against Violence document increasing professionalization, medicalization, and bureaucratization as movement organizations accept government and foundation funding to provide shelter and advocacy, displacing a political analysis of gendered and racialized violence for an individualized approach to “healing.” Now heavily reliant on government funding, these organizations collaborated with the state in the 1980s just as Reagan's law and order politics mobilized the specter of racialized threat to bolster support for prison

⁴⁹ Rodriguez, p. 29.

⁵⁰ Aronowitz quoted in Wagner, p. 149.

and policing expansion. In turning to the state for financial support and legitimacy the political aims of the movement were co-opted and used as a rationale to expand the prison industrial complex and increase surveillance and policing of urban communities of color – forms of violence that the earlier domestic violence movement placed at the center of their critique.⁵¹ Now activists describe a domestic violence sheltering system that is punitive, individualized, led by white professional social workers rather than survivors of violence, and focused on “healing” rather than justice or systems change. It is, in fact, frustration with this system that generated and popularized a critique of the NPIC; Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, a group founded by anti-violence activists of color to protest the racism of the contemporary mainstream domestic violence movement, expanded its critique to address what they see as one major underlying cause for this co-optation: the non-profit industrial complex.

It is not just non-profits that provide direct social services like shelter, however, that are demobilized by these relationships. Ruth Wilson Gilmore argues that those “grassroots groups that have formally joined the third sector” exist in the “shadow” of what Jennifer Wolch calls “the shadow state.”⁵² Gilmore writes:

What’s wrong is not simply the economic dependencies fostered by this peculiar set of relationships and interests. More important, if forms do indeed shape norms, then what’s wrong is that the work that people set out to accomplish is vulnerable to becoming mission impossible under the sternly specific funding rubrics and structural prohibitions that situate

⁵¹ See Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, *The Color of Violence* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2006); Priya Kandaswami, “Innocent Victims and Brave New Laws,” in *Nobody Passes: Rejecting the Rules of Gender and Conformity*, Matilda Bernstein Sycamore, Ed. (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2006).

⁵² Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “In the Shadow of the Shadow State,” *The Revolution Will Not be Funded*, Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, Eds. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007), p. 47.

grassroots groups both in the third sector's entanglements and in the shadow of the shadow state.⁵³

All non-profit organizations, even small, politically radical grassroots organizations, are implicated in this web of state power, corporate wealth, and the disciplining function of charity. This dissertation specifically addresses the impact of this system on LGBT social movements, investigating how the institutional location of movement organizations – the non-profit system – impacts their politics. In particular, I argue that the shift towards what Lisa Duggan and others call “homonormativity” – a politics of assimilation, consumption, and incorporation – is due in large part to the non-profitization of queer social movements.

Although there were always influential white-dominated assimilationist strains within the early gay and lesbian movement, by the late 1960s and early 1970s there were powerful voices and organizations spurring the nascent LGBT movement towards a radical, intersectional critique of state power and normativity. Activists and organizations articulated solidarity with Black and Brown revolutionary people's organizations, organized for an end to the Vietnam War, and mobilized a critique of not just sexual normativities but capitalist heteropatriarchy. Now however, the dominant voices in the LGBT movement are focused on a narrow “equality” agenda, organizing for inclusion into existing systems of power through marriage, hate crimes penalty enhancements, and access to out military service. This, Duggan argues, is a “politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized,

⁵³ *Ibid.*

depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.”⁵⁴ For Duggan, this shift in politics is due in large part to neoliberalism, with the stripped down politics of homonormativity reflective of larger trends towards hollow multiculturalism and a broader cultural politics discursively buttressing corporate profits and the upward redistribution of wealth. Homonormativity is, Duggan argues, a “new window-dressing for a broad, multi-issue neoliberal politics.”⁵⁵ This work builds on the work of Duggan and others scholars concerned with the politics of homonormativity, by investigating how – through what technologies of power and discursive frameworks – such politics are articulated.

An Embedded Non-Profit: A Note on Method and Theory

This project explores the mechanics of the social in neoliberalism, the ubiquitous and messy ruptures between the logics of neoliberalism and its daily practices, and the blurry lines between social movements and social services. In doing so, I rely on an interdisciplinary approach involving ethnography, interviews, archival research, and personal reflection. The dissertation centers on case studies at four Midwestern LGBT non-profits, two in Chicago and two in Minneapolis. Exploring the blurriness of the landscape of the non-profit is central to this project, exposing the conflicting logics that structure non-profits and stage a drama about the limits of community and how “we” imagine a better world. Using interviews – with staff, volunteers, participants, donors, and board members – and analyzing archival records – including local gay newspaper

⁵⁴ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003) p. 50.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

coverage, internal communications, strategic plans, grant applications, and fundraising appeals – I examine the ways that individuals and organizations grapple with the constraints of private and state funding, the pressures of austerity, the dynamics of the charity framework, and the way that community is articulated and enacted.

Much of what little critical scholarship on the NPIC exists is focused on organizations on the coasts, particularly in New York and San Francisco – organizations blessed with greater access to funding and a critical mass of organizers attuned to the dangers of co-optation, who are the beneficiaries of local legacies of revolutionary organizing outside the non-profit system. Organizations in major coastal urban centers, though they are often universalized to stand in for all organizations and imagined to be “national” or even “global” – especially in queer scholarship – are, in many ways, outliers. A critical look at non-profits in the Midwest tells us more about the system *as a system* than does an analysis of exceptional organizations on the coasts. Though there certainly is a strong history of activism in the Midwest, from union struggles, to the Chicago chapter of the Black Panthers, to the American Indian Movement, activism is still much more likely to take place from within larger social services, as there is simply a heavier concentration of social services and fewer organizational alternatives. Because of the history of Progressive Era social work in Minnesota in particular, social services have a strong influence on organizing in Minneapolis, both materially and discursively.⁵⁶ At the organizations I analyze, therefore, the strong interplay of neoliberal discourses of community, disciplinary logics of compassion, contested orientations towards capital, and the pervasive sense of crisis are all the more apparent.

⁵⁶ See Molly Ladd Taylor, “Coping with a Public Menace,” *Minnesota History*, Vol. 59, No. 6 (Summer, 2005), pp. 237-248

The organizations I examine are all spaces to which I am connected, to greater or lesser degrees. At one space, I was an employee for two years, at another I was a board member.⁵⁷ The other two I engaged with as a community member, and, at one, in my capacity as a staff member at a partner organization. This proximity both offers me a unique perspective and poses interesting methodological challenges. I approach these spaces as what Sara Ahmed calls “contact zones” between institutional and everyday forms of contact. According to Ahmed, contact writing does “not simply interweave the personal and the public, the individual and the social, but show[s] the ways in which they take shape through each other, or even how they shape each other.”⁵⁸ The people with whom I speak are critical actors – they know what they are doing as much, if not more, than I know what I am doing – they struggle, they make choices, they are constrained, and their ideas about the world are produced, as are mine, through powerful and pervasive cultural narratives about difference, inequality, merit, citizenship, and “the good life.” I share with them an investment in queer non-profits, an investment of emotional and physical energy, and I share with them the frustration that the work we want to be doing is often constrained, co-opted, or just out of the reach of our

⁵⁷ I was a case manager at the Broadway Youth Center, a program of Howard Brown Health Center in Chicago, from 2006-2008, during which time I worked in collaboration with staff of the Center on Halsted. Further, many clients of the Broadway Youth Center attended programs at the Center, so I had even greater access to information about that organization through the stories that were shared with me by those clients. A few years after my time as an employee of Howard Brown I returned to Chicago to conduct approximately 30 one-on-one interviews over a period of four years, from 2010 through 2014. In Minneapolis I also conducted one-on-one interviews with former youth participants, staff, board members, and donors of District 202. Further, I conducted participant observation ethnography as a volunteer and then Board member of the Trans Youth Support Network (TYSN) in Minneapolis from 2009-2014. These interviews were augmented by archival research at the Gerber/Hart library in Chicago and the Jean Nickolaus Tretter Collection at the University of Minnesota Library.

⁵⁸ Ahmed, p. 14.

imaginings. At various points I also intensely disagree with them, and challenge their assumptions about the organizations they work for or believe in.

In negotiating my sometimes conflicted relationship with the organizations I study and the people on whose experiences this dissertation relies, I practice what Judith Stacey calls “partially feminist ethnography,” an approach that recognizes the power dynamics embedded in the practice of ethnography and the impossibility of representing the voice of others.⁵⁹ For Stacey, truly “feminist” ethnography is an impossibility; there can be no “field” in which the researcher does not occupy a position of power, “profiting” off of the experiences of another, and a mirage of equality masks the possibility, perhaps even inevitability, of exploitation and even betrayal. Following Stacey, I attempt to practice ethnography that is “rigorously self-aware and therefore humble about the partiality of its ethnographic vision.”⁶⁰ There are times that my interpretation of events, issues, and decisions might well be perceived by my informants as a betrayal, although I have attempted to be forthright about my politics and analysis with everyone who trusted me with their experiences.

The impossibility of representing the other is one with which I have struggled mightily throughout this project. One area in which this struggle has been particularly acute has been in the question of whether and how to chronicle the experiences of clients and participants of the non-profits I study, participants who occupy a particularly vulnerable position in relationship to those organizations and to me as a researcher. When my location was one of case manager rather than researcher, I often received calls and

⁵⁹ Judith Stacey, “Can There be a Feminist Ethnography?” *Women’s Studies International Forum*, Volume 11, Number 1, (1998), p. 26.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

emails from scholars investigating queer youth homelessness, or transgender teens, or HIV/AIDS. Those researchers sometimes wanted to host a focus group, sometimes have clients complete surveys, and sometimes conduct one-on-one interviews, often in exchange for a ten or fifteen dollar Target gift card, or something comparable. I often went to great lengths to reroute or dissuade those researchers, out of a concern that the cost – unearthing traumas – outweighed the benefit – a few dollars to spend at Target. In conversations with my colleagues – many of whom are now, years later, informants – we discussed what we felt was the ethical failure of asking people working every day to survive to let down their guards and expose traumas often held at bay, out of necessity, through sheer force of will, sometimes with the help of substances, simply so that someone could write a book.

Now, of course, I am the researcher, a position that frequently privileges the necessity of documenting, however partially, the experiences of those who are often absent from popular and scholarly discourse, and whose absence is necessary for power structures to remain as they are. Johannes Fabian grapples with this question in his article “Presence and Representation,” in which he begins with a meditation on Jean-Paul Dumont’s defense of representation. Dumont argues: “it is because of this [absence] that these others can in the end be represented by the anthropologist, for, if they were here, there would be no point in representing them, that is, to stand for them and to speak for them.”⁶¹ This paradox – the importance of documenting the experiences of marginalized subjects out of a concern with justice coupled with the exploitation inherent in doing so – has been a central methodological, theoretical, and ethical quandary for this project. What

⁶¹ Jean-Paul Dumont, quoted in Johannes Fabian, “Presence and Representation: The Other and Anthropological Writing,” *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (Summer, 1990). P. 755. 35

this has meant for this particular project is that I rely much more heavily on the experiences and perspectives of staff of non-profits – as well as volunteers, donors, board members and the like – rather than clients and participants. I chose not to conduct focus groups or offer monetary compensation for interviews. When I do interview clients or participants they are people with whom I have a relationship – in one case fellow board members – or they are in a position where the cost of sharing their experiences is mitigated somewhat by their circumstances – their basic needs are met, they have the emotional and physical space to wander through their memories without significant trauma. This is what Johannes Fabian calls a practice of “not-writing,” an ethical approach to gathering and interpreting ethnographic “data” that recognizes that what is *not* written is sometimes just as, if not more, important than what is.⁶² While there is certainly another dissertation to be written that centers the experiences of clients of non-profits, this methodological choice has opened a particular affective window, one onto the emotional lives of staff, board members, volunteers, people who believe in non-profits, who invest in them, who are let down by them, who try to make them better.

In writing about these spaces, I am using the actual organization names, but obscuring the names of my informants and referring to them throughout using pseudonyms. The organizations are each unique in the Midwest – the only trans-specific youth organization, for example, or the only LGBT health center – so obscuring their names would not actually obscure their identities. Instead, I have changed the names of my informants, and often their personal characteristics, their job titles, or the dates of their involvement, and at times, even split one informant’s narrative into two pseudonym

⁶² Fabian, p. 770.

identities.⁶³ Because I ask informants to speak candidly about leadership failures, questionable decisions, unhealthy workplace dynamics, frustrations, and fears, and because, in the case of clients and staff, they are reliant on those organizations for either services or a paycheck, it is critical that their contribution to this project not jeopardize their relationship with the organization. Despite obscuring these details of their identities, I have carefully crafted pseudonym identities that represent similar, if not identical, positionalities.

Perhaps also due to my experience working in LGBT non-profits, and seeing the youth who vanish – maybe locked up, perhaps staying with family - the staff struggling with burnout and stress, the volunteers who come and go, the *trauma* held in these spaces, I am also particularly attuned to the *absences*: those who are not there and perhaps never were, those who were there but are now gone, ideas that have been tried and failed, silences, gaps, failures of institutional memory, failures of personal memory. These absences are central to my methodological approach and are what Herman Gray and Macarena Gómez-Barris call “social traces,” the “excess in the collision between structural projects and social experience.”⁶⁴ Excavating social traces requires attention to the “materiality of the trace,” and also its remnants, the feeling of its present absence.

Also due to my positionality, I am uniquely attuned to the role of affect – the political economy of feelings – at work in the non-profit system. This is both a theoretical and methodological commitment. Affect is a key conduit through which the power of the

⁶³ Marion Goldman offers an example of this kind of “composite” narrative intended to protect the identities of the women whose lives she traced in her ethnography investigating women’s experiences with a Pacific Northwest cult. See Goldman, *Passionate Journey: Why Successful Women Joined a Cult* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

⁶⁴ Herman Gray and Macarena Gómez-Barris, “Traces in the Social World.” P. 4. 37

non-profit system flows, reliant as it is on feelings of generosity on the part of donors, their sense of connection, their understanding of themselves as citizens, as community members, as “leaders” with something to offer. It is also through affect, though, that we can glimpse the system breaking down, the ruptures and inconsistencies, failures and contradictions: youth who are expected to feel grateful but don’t, expected to be disempowered but aren’t, the frustration and sadness of staff despite the cultural narrative that holds that they are “doing such *good work*.”

Methodologically, I analyze non-profits as what Ann Cvetkovich calls “repositories of feelings and emotions.”⁶⁵ These non-profit sites “become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension.”⁶⁶

Chapter One addresses the murky space between social movements and social services at the Howard Brown Health Center (HBHC) in Chicago, my former employer.⁶⁷ I focus on the development of their HIV/AIDS programs in the 1980s as well the contemporary story of their youth homelessness program, the Broadway Youth Center (BYC). Both of these moments illustrate the limits of the institutional logic of *compassion*. This site reveals the legacy of an older charity framework, animated by discourses of worthiness and uplift, inherited by the modern non-profit. I first trace how the particular narrative of AIDS mobilized by HBHC, necessitated by the quest to corporatize their institutional structure, imagined HIV positive people of color as outside “the community,” at risk because of injection drug use and not same sex sexual behavior. Instead, as Howard Brown turned towards major donors and corporate sponsorships, they

⁶⁵ Ann Cvetkovich, *Archive of Feelings* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 7.

⁶⁶ Ahmed, p. 11.

⁶⁷ All organizational names are pseudonyms, in compliance with IRB protocol.

mobilized a compassion narrative of the deserving victim made poor by illness, an alternative to the racialized anti-welfare discourse of the period that was palatable to white, suburban, affluent donors and corporate sponsors. Ultimately this strategy relied on and endorsed the same narrative of compassion and charity that was, during that very period, being mobilized by Reagan to dismantle the social welfare system. In contrast, the issue of queer youth homelessness presents a fundamental challenge to the single-issue identity politics of Howard Brown, and the alignment between the BYC and its parent organization has always been uneasy. At Howard Brown, after three decades of corporatization of management systems, the consolidation of a traditional development and administrative machine, and the incorporation of neoliberal values at every level, the BYC hardly fits into Howard Brown's strategic positioning as a "boutique" clinic that wealthy, insured, LGBT people would choose to utilize.

Chapter Two addresses the production and management of *community* at the Center on Halsted, the Chicago LGBT Community Center: its appeal, the mechanics of its production, the affective economies on which it relies, the moments it exceeds the terms under which it was mobilized, and the possibilities it enables and forecloses. This chapter analyzes a series of conflicts over who constitutes "the community" of the Community Center, why, and to what ends. Following a series of incidences of violence in the Boystown neighborhood and a video gone viral purporting to "capture" that violence, a campaign to "Take Back Boystown" was launched with the Center occupying center stage. Conflict ensued over the increasing numbers of queer and gender-non-conforming homeless youth of color accessing the Community Center, and the idea held by some in the neighborhood that the Center was a "magnet" drawing those

“undesirable” youth to the fashionable and gentrifying gay neighborhood of Boystown. A second conflict is the uneasy relationship between the community center and one of its programs, the Chicago LGBT Anti-Violence Project (AVP). The Center’s AVP accepted an anti-sex trafficking grant from the Cook County State’s Attorney’s office despite the seeming knowledge that it would do very little to increase the safety of the young people it targeted – and perhaps even further endanger them – once again illustrating the institutional structures which butt up against and enforce the limits of “community.” I argue that community, in the institutional arrangement considered in this chapter, functions according to a biopolitical rather than strictly disciplinary logic. In the context of neoliberalism’s ever-expanding ability to incorporate particular queer bodies into the national imaginary and technologies of control, community is increasingly the logic through which some queer bodies are protected and folded into (national) life, and others are located outside the life of the nation, a threat to it, and exposed to early death. At the Chicago LGBT Community Center, some queer lives are optimized through therapy, social programs, educational offerings, job resources, and networking, while other lives are located outside “the community,” and regulated through explicit relationships with the police, the on-site security guards, and conflicts over the space itself.

Chapter Three turns to an LGBT youth space in Minneapolis, District 202, documenting its (contested) transformation from a social justice organization into a “social entrepreneurship” organization pursuing “mainstreaming” through collaborations with corporate partners, culminating in its ultimate loss of its non-profit status. The transformation of this organization offers a useful window into the role of *capital* in contemporary LGBT social movements in the US. District 202 was envisioned as an

organization “by and for” LGBT youth, a direct critique of the compassion logic of the charity model, in which only the elites “know what’s best” for the targets of their services. But what does “by and for” youth mean for the structure of the organization? Is a non-profit infrastructure compatible with true leadership of marginalized people? This chapter considers one of the core questions of this project, whether the non-profit form can be used to advance social justice. The transformation of District 202 illustrates that the danger is in assuming the non-profit form is benign, simply “good,” or vacant of power, ready to be occupied by the progressive politics of the organization.

Chapter Four analyzes a Minneapolis organization with which I have worked for many years, the Trans Youth Support Network. TYSN was founded by a group of primarily white youth workers after a series of instances of violence against trans women of color in Minneapolis in 2006. Those young, white, queer lefties wanted to challenge social services to become more accessible to trans people, believing that if trans youth had more of their basic needs met they would be subject to less violence. This chapter considers how trans youth of color, who occupy a status of social death, can and cannot engage with the non-profit structure. TYSN points to the necessity of what Avery Gordon calls a “stance of undefeated despair,” the simultaneous grief and rage over the ubiquitous violence directed at brown trans bodies, that “is the basis for the carrying-on-regardless that the struggle for emancipation and happiness requires.”⁶⁸

Exploring the various ways that activists take seriously the non-profit structure and attempt to work their way around it, thwart it, take it, and use it for liberatory ends,

⁶⁸ Avery Gordon, “The Prisoner’s Curse,” *Towards a Sociology of the Trace*, Herman Gray and Macarena Gomez-Barris, Eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 18.

the conclusion takes up the stance of undefeated despair and considers the value of melancholia, disidentification, mourning, and other practices of resistance. Specifically, the conclusion considers concrete practices that queer organizers can use to resist the co-optation of their work and politics that the non-profit structure invites. Instead, the conclusion explores the liberatory potential of communities of care articulated through their critique of capitalism.

Chapter One

The Limits of Compassion: Institutionalizing Affective Economies of AIDS and Homelessness

I cannot for the life of me figure out how the organization that I helped form has become such a bastion of conservatism and such a bureaucratic mess. The bigger you get, the more cowardly you become; the more money you receive, the more self-satisfied. You no longer fight for the living. You have become a funeral home. You and your huge assortment of caretakers perform miraculous tasks of helping the dying die. ... I think it must now come as a big surprise to your Board of Directors that the GMHC [Gay Men's Health Crisis] was not founded to heal those who are ill. It was founded to protect the living, to help the living go on living, to help those still healthy stay healthy, to help gay men stay alive.⁶⁹

- Larry Kramer

The above epigraph was one of a handful of photocopies of national GLBT press coverage of HIV/AIDS and HIV/AIDS organizations found in the Howard Brown Health Center archive at Gerber/Hart Library in Chicago. In this article, the founding Executive Director of GMHC laments what he perceived as the bureaucratization, corporatization, and loss of political mission of one of the earliest and most important community responses to HIV/AIDS. He goes on to argue that the mission of gay community responses to HIV/AIDS must exceed simply offering direct services, or else they will simply be providing cover for the city or state *not* to provide those services. He writes: “but in taking our money, you are, in essence, asking us to pay twice for what you are doing – once in our contributions to you, and once in our taxes to the city.”⁷⁰ Instead, he argues that gay community responses must have a specifically *queer* politics, “something

⁶⁹ Photocopy of open letter from Larry Kramer to Richard Dunne, ED of GMHC, from *Native*, January 26, 1986. Found in unlabeled Howard Brown box at Gerber/Hart Archive and Library, Chicago, IL.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

our city will never provide.”⁷¹ Sadly, he writes, “you have become only another city social service agency, and at the rate one hears about your inner squabbings...it will not be long before you are indistinguishable from any of the city departments – health, police, parking violations – that serve our city so tepidly.”⁷² Although certainly describing a very different local political dynamic and set of organizational politics, this critique offers an important perspective on early LGBT community health responses to HIV/AIDS – important enough to have been photocopied and saved by someone at what was then called Howard Brown Memorial Clinic. As I argue in this chapter, amidst the intense pressure of the AIDS crisis, the social service model that many LGBT organizations had adopted relied on a narrative of compassion and charity that ultimately endorsed the violences of the state that turned AIDS into a targeted weapon: privatization, abandonment, funding cuts, policing, and wholesale attacks on the social safety net.

In this chapter, I turn my attention to that organization, a Chicago LGBT clinic and social service organization founded in 1975. Named after the first out gay health commissioner for New York City, Dr. Howard Brown, Howard Brown Memorial Clinic (HBMC), now Howard Brown Health Center, was the brainchild of a small group of out gay medical students.⁷³ With the institutional backing of the then also fledgling local organization Gay Horizons, they began to offer STD testing in a tiny storefront on Chicago’s north side. Due in large part to federal funding to research Hepatitis B and then test the subsequent vaccine, HBMC already had an infrastructure in place when the first

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Throughout the chapter I will refer to the organization using both acronyms HBMC and HBHC, according to the organizational name during time period in question.

AIDS cases hit Chicago. Throughout the decade of the 1980s, the organization built its services significantly: expanding its research wing to include, among others, the MACS study (Multi-Center AIDS Cohort Study), adding a volunteer-staffed buddy system called the AIDS Action Project, offering case management, an AIDS hotline, and, in 1985, testing services. Alongside these programs, its administrative infrastructure also grew, such that in its 1990 annual report, the organization reported that “during the late 80s, HBMC completed the successful transition from grass-roots community clinic to a professional research, health and human services center.”⁷⁴ Currently the organization has a budget of more than \$22 million, serving more than 18,000 people a year in their primary care clinic, case management, behavioral health, research, HIV/STD prevention, elder services, off-site homeless youth drop-in, and three resale shops.

I begin by exploring the logic of compassion, how it functions as a mode of governance, and the affective economies on which it relies. Using this theoretical frame, the rest of the chapter analyzes the institutionalization of this organization in and through two significant – but very different - moments of crisis, one in the 1980s and the second in the more recent past. In the 1980s, organizational dysfunction maps onto a landscape of trauma, as fully half the organization’s clients died of AIDS, failed by a social safety net ravaged by Reagan’s anti-statist policies. I begin by exploring how the group’s very conventional white gay professional founding organizers relied on “common-sense” ideas and technologies of non-profit structure, tracing their attempts over the decade of the 1980s to build their institutional infrastructure according to those logics. I then analyze how this process of institutionalization was impacted by the trauma of AIDS, looking in

⁷⁴ Howard Brown Memorial Clinic Annual Report. 1990. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Archive and Library, Chicago.

particular at how the organization mobilized an affective narrative about AIDS in order to raise necessary funds, a narrative – while effective – that was fundamentally a white, middle-class story of crisis. As Howard Brown turned towards major donors and corporate sponsorships, they mobilized a narrative of the deserving victim made poor by illness, an alternative to the racialized anti-welfare discourse of the period that was palatable to white, suburban, affluent donors and corporate sponsors. I then examine how that “fundable” AIDS narrative mobilized by Howard Brown imagined HIV positive people of color as outside “the community,” at risk because of injection drug use and not same sex sexual behavior. Ultimately this strategy relied on and endorsed the same narrative of compassion and charity that was, during that very period, being mobilized by Reagan to dismantle the social welfare system.

Nearly thirty years later, Howard Brown’s queer youth homelessness intervention, the Broadway Youth Center (BYC), must grapple with the limits of the compassion narrative mobilized in the 1980s. In my years as a case manager at the Broadway Youth Center, I observed how that logic of compassion produced crisis within its youth homelessness programs and, more broadly, entrenched the social crisis that produces that homelessness to begin with. Queer youth homelessness has increasingly been “discovered” as a social – and fundable – issue by national and regional LGBT organizations, albeit primarily through a narrow, identity-based lens that fails to account for the racialized and gendered impact of poverty, lack of affordable housing, welfare “reform,” law and order criminalization, and gentrification. The issue of queer youth homelessness presents a fundamental challenge to the single-issue identity politics of HBHC, and the alignment between the BYC and its parent organization has always

been uneasy. At HBHC, after two decades of corporatization of management systems, the consolidation of a traditional development and administrative machine, and the incorporation of neoliberal values at every level, the BYC hardly fits into Howard Brown's strategic positioning as a "boutique" clinic that wealthy, *insured* LGBT people would choose to utilize.

Although much about these two historical moments is very different, organizational dysfunction marks this contemporary period as well. In 2008 the organization was found to have misused federal funds associated with the MACS study, by using restricted funds – those designated for specific programmatic activities – for general operating costs, specifically to cover the unreimbursed cost of providing medical care to uninsured patients. A very public scandal ensued, and the organization was forced to return \$500,000, leaving it with a major shortfall in its operating budget. In order to raise the funds necessary to keep the doors open, the organization – using a PR firm – launched a "lifeline appeal," utilizing YouTube testimonials from staff, clients, and supporters to raise \$500,000 in 50 days. I analyze the conflicting affective logics at work in this appeal in order to think about the limits of compassion. The appeal raised the money successfully, due in large part to the affective narrative about crisis that simultaneously hailed and mobilized "the community."

Unlike the AIDS crisis, which emerged as a point of connection and solidarity, the poverty and homelessness experienced by so many BYC clients has, instead, the feeling of what Lauren Berlant calls "crisis ordinariness": a systemic crisis that is not exceptional, but instead "embedded in the ordinary."⁷⁵ Despite the degree to which the

⁷⁵ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2011), p. 10. 47

BYC is used as a “golden jewel” for fundraising purposes, the program is devalued, under-resourced, and ultimately the politics of the organization do not fully claim the work of the BYC. In many ways the precarity of the program mirrors the precarity of the young people who access it to meet their basic needs – and for similar systemic reasons.

My purpose here is to think about the relationship between crisis and compassion: materially, affectively, and discursively. The very strong role of the state in this particular organization makes it an ideal site from which to analyze the logic of compassion and the disciplinary technologies of the welfare state at work in queer non-profits: the legacy and institutional apparatus of the charity framework grafted on to a putatively political project. AIDS and homelessness – and the moral economies, institutional structures, funding narratives, and service frameworks that have developed to manage them – offer two particular, contextual, and specific alignments of these structures of power.

Governance through Compassion

*Compassion may itself be a substitute for justice ... compassion always already signifies inequality. The compassionate intend no justice, for justice might disrupt current power relationships.*⁷⁶

- Hannah Arendt

Candace Vogler writes: “Of the many species of tenderness directed towards others’ troubles, compassion falls squarely in the range of affective orientations with a built-in hands-clean clause.”⁷⁷ She differentiates compassion from other affective postures like regret and mercy by stressing how the compassionate person “sympathizes

⁷⁶ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*. Quoted in David Wagner, *What’s Love Got to Do With It? A Critical Look at American Charity* (New York: The New Press, 2000).

⁷⁷ Candace Vogler, “Much of Madness and More of Sin,” *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*, Ed. Lauren Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004). 48

with misfortunes that she did not cause and that would not otherwise touch her life.”

“Accordingly,” she writes, “any intervention that she undertakes from compassion...will involve generosity or kindness. ... While it’s good to help strangers now and then, you do not *owe* aid and comfort to particular strangers.” This has, of course, been the defining logic of the social safety net in the United States since colonial times, the framework behind what Loïc Wacquant calls “the charitable state.” He is referring both to the material function of non-governmental organizations in the provision of care – the state provides services through charities themselves – but even more so to the affective tilt of the safety net:

The guiding principle of public action in this domain is not solidarity but *compassion*; its goal is not to reinforce social bonds, and less still to reduce inequalities, but at best to relieve the most glaring destitution and to demonstrate society’s moral sympathy for its deprived but deserving members.⁷⁸

Wacquant demonstrates that this logic has been critical in the transformation into what he calls the “carceral society,” in which “the criminalization of marginality and the punitive containment of dispossessed categories serve as social policy.”⁷⁹ Compassion, then, is both an engine and an effect of neoliberal social and economic changes. Lauren Berlant writes that compassion is “at the heart of the shrinkage [of the welfare state], because the attendant policies relocate the template of justice from the collective condition of specific populations to that of the individual, whose economic sovereignty the state vows to protect.”⁸⁰ Much has been made of George W. Bush’s “compassionate conservatism,”

⁷⁸ Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 42.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁸⁰ Lauren Berlant, “Compassion (and Withholding),” *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*. Ed. Lauren Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 2.

and Bill Clinton famously “feels your pain.” Though compassion has been an important mode of governance throughout US history, it has become useful in a renewed way under neoliberalism as the moral logic of transformation of the social safety net, which knits the disciplinary function of earlier incarnations of the welfare state to the new affirmative modes of governance found in community-based non-profits.

Though neoliberal governance is increasingly affirmative, as I explore in the next chapter, and encourages individuals to internalize market logics and become self-governing entrepreneurial subjects, the heavy hand of surveillance, policing, and bodily discipline has not dissipated. The punitive moralism of compassion is built into workfare, TANF, public housing – all public benefits that remain after welfare “reform” – through systems like time limitations, work requirements, drug testing, child limits, marriage incentives, and other, less tangible, mechanisms of surveillance. But the punitive moralism of compassion is also vitally embedded into the charity model of social services, and as those services increasingly provide services once offered by the state, the disciplinary power of non-profits intensifies.

Berlant argues that compassion is a “social and aesthetic technology of belonging;” it is this approach to compassion that animates this chapter. As the example of Howard Brown demonstrates, non-profit organizations must appeal to a narrative of compassion, to incite compassion in others, literally in order to exist; donors give because it *feels* good, and non-profits, in order to get that donation, must make donors feel good, feel heroic, feel pleasure in that gift. Marjorie Garber notes, however, that compassion is

“felt not between equals but from a distance – in effect, from high to low.”⁸¹ Moreover, Lauren Berlant describes the posture of compassion as one that “denotes privilege: the sufferer is *over there*.”⁸² The compassionate one must never be made to feel at fault, implicated in the social condition that produces the suffering they see and in response to which they feel compassion. So in order to incite compassion in donors, non-profit organizations must exhibit particular affects and not others, must produce the correct conditions among staff, clients, participants, volunteers, and donors. This becomes most readily apparent through the relation of “deserving-ness”: the organization must articulate its clients – and through its clients its services and programs – as uniquely deserving. Deserving-ness is always, of course, articulated against its other, the figure of the “undeserving” poor. But there are other postures that invite compassion: thankfulness, neediness, desperation – although one can’t be *too* desperate, lest their pain produce discomfort in the giver, or suggest that they *deserve* something – and perhaps even that the giver *does not*. Compassion is a tricky affect; one, to reiterate, wholly counter to the project of actually creating justice. Its impact on the kind of queer politics that can be articulated from within LGBT non-profits is profound.

Despite the fact that it is, I maintain, deeply damaging to queer social movements, compassion is, nonetheless, sincerely felt, and powerful. One of its powers, I argue, is that it demands, *and creates*, crisis. In order to be deserving of compassion, one must constantly be in crisis; if the object of compassion begins to thrive, they are no longer deserving of compassion. For example, one constant source of frustration during my

⁸¹ Marjorie Garber, “Compassion,” in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*. Ed. Lauren Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 20.

⁸² Berlant, “Compassion (and Withholding),” p. 4.

years working at Howard Brown was that it was very difficult for uninsured transgender clients to access trans specific healthcare, *unless* they were HIV+. But once they were positive, that medical care was funded through Howard Brown's many contracts with the state Department of Public Health and the CDC. In a cruel irony, uninsured trans clients were often unable to access the affirming care that would make it less likely they would be exposed to HIV, but once they were, they could access those services.

As the animating feature of neoliberal governance, compassion also produces crisis on a broader social scale, and these two scales of crisis reflect and amplify one another. In both historical moments that I explore in this chapter, these two scales of crisis are apparent, as the institutional dysfunction, burnout, financial strain, and frustration of staff mirrors the precarity in the lives of the people with whom they work.

Dynamics of Institutionalization: Neoliberalism and Ideas of “Non-Profit-ness”

The inception of HBMC was enabled by a particular alignment of forces: the need was there, as gay men had nowhere to get safe and competent medical treatment for STDs. But also, the queer political and cultural climate in Chicago offered a self-identified community of patients, volunteers, and eventually, donors. Prior to the opening of the clinic there was nowhere that gay men could go to get safe and accessible care for sexually transmitted infections. In her dissertation, *Before AIDS: Gay and Lesbian Community Health Activism in the 1970s*, historian Katie Batza traces these early days of Howard Brown, noting that the history of the HBMC differs significantly from that of other gay and lesbian community health organizations that began in the same time period, like Fenway Community Health Center in Boston. HBMC, Batza argues, was much

more conventional in its political stance and organizational structure, in large part because it was started by a group of gay doctors and medical students fully immersed in the professionalization of their field, rather than Fenway's group of community activists. Batza goes on to describe how HBMC combined the more formal concern with medical research and scholarship of the Chicago-based American Medical Association with the political proponents of socialized healthcare that was a major focus of the healthcare movement at that time. HBMC has had a very strong relationship with the state, particularly through federally funded medical research, throughout its history. Beginning in the period in which money was still flowing strongly through the Great Society-era funding for community-based organizations, HBMC managed to persevere in the 1980s when other organizations were hard hit by the Reagan administration's funding cuts, due in large part to this already strong medical research funding infrastructure. Although this medical research money continues to be a major part of their funding model, HBMC did follow the increasingly neoliberal non-profit model taken up by most organizations during the 1980s and 1990s. With gala fundraisers, mass mailings, corporate sponsorships, foundation funding, donor tracking databases, and logic models, Howard Brown is a perfect example of the neoliberalization of major LGBT non-profits, replete with the constant crisis atmosphere of high staff turnover, widespread dysfunction, and a constant state of fiscal instability.

HBMC's early history helps contextualize the path of corporatization that the organization took throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The make-up of the organization in its early years – all professional white gay men – is perhaps informative as to their assumptions about the non-profit form. The archival record of HBMC's early years

depicts an organization that, despite its sex positivity, creative programming, and strong community and volunteer support, also adopted an overly formal and conventional organizational structure. For instance, the decision-making model clearly relied on Roberts Rules of Order, with decisions recorded in detail – “all in favor so signify”. The use of Roberts Rules of Order suggests that accessibility for non-white, non-wealthy, non-men was likely not considered; instead an organizational culture was built to mirror the professionalism of these young white doctors. The founding organizers simply relied on their “common-sense” ideas about what constitutes a “real” organization. A casual note from a 1980 Board of Directors meeting to hire a “girl Friday” to take on part-time administrative labor at the clinic further evinces these blind spots.⁸³

The archival record reveals ongoing tension around organizational sustainability, as the organization tried to institutionalize through traditional non-profit mechanisms, which, as we’ve seen, are themselves fundamentally untenable. Despite receiving federal medical research funds very early, for instance, they didn’t begin having regular board meetings until 1980 and didn’t receive their first foundation grant until 1984. Over the decade there was considerable turnover in leadership staff, particularly of Executive Directors, who left with alarming regularity, reflecting and contributing to enormous organizational instability. Some cited the pressure of dealing with the ravages of AIDS on the community, but many named organizational dysfunction as the primary reason for their exit. One departing Executive Director helpfully outlined many of these dynamics in a fiery resignation letter. He wrote:

⁸³ Board Minutes, April 12th, 1980. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

It is clear to me that no executive director can succeed at HBMC unless there is fundamental change in management, expectations, and philosophy. The reorganization that occurred last February is deficient and indicative of the failure to identify problems... The reorganization, subsequent position descriptions and role definitions do not reflect a mature understanding of an organization, nor the functions required to maintain the organization. ... What is striking about the position descriptions is the strong emphasis on control and finance, and the lack of emphasis on program and the functions and skills necessary to manage ... What has occurred is a classic textbook situation. An inexperienced Board, with a strong President finds itself with operational (internal) problems. The Board (and for HBMC the problem is historical), unsure of its role, mistrustful of the ED, becomes distracted from Board functions and involved in operations.⁸⁴

The departing Executive Director, Jerry Tomlinson, describes what he calls “textbook” organizational dysfunction. I would argue that the “textbook” to which he refers is a set of shared frameworks and technologies of non-profitization, which, despite being fundamentally unsustainable in and of themselves, are understood to be simply a set of technologies that can be applied, tweaked, perfected, and managed to peak efficiency. This fundamental ruse of non-profitization is wildly successful – people at every organization I study absolutely believe that there is a way to make their organizations stable and sustainable over the long term, a belief that is necessary, I know, for people to get up and go into work every day, especially in the context of profound and urgent need.

What is significant in this example is the degree to which clearly widespread organizational dysfunction is individualized. Although Tomlinson begins the letter by naming fundamental organizational dynamics, much of the letter singles out a set of individuals. He writes: “compounding this classic situation is the history of Abramson, Johnson, and Kepling with the clinic. There are people who had major responsibilities

⁸⁴ Jerry Tomlinson, Resignation Letter to Board of Directors, August 14th 1987. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

for directing and the guiding of the clinic prior to the reorganization. They cannot exempt themselves from HBMC's problem[s]."⁸⁵ Interestingly, when Tomlinson was hired – to replace an ED who resigned with little notice – he was immediately given personal responsibility for an intimidating array of broad organizational failures. In a memo to the newly hired Tomlinson from the Executive Committee of the Board, they outline some of the tasks to be undertaken immediately and reported on after only one week. They wrote:

The members of the Executive Committee and the entire board are extremely happy to have you aboard. We realize that the scope of the challenges ahead of you may seem a bit overwhelming at first. Consequently, we thought it would be helpful to you to set forth for you the areas that require your immediate attention.

1. Implement a system for monitoring cash flow.
2. Determine whether a feasibility study should be conducted on primary care.
3. Develop a funding proposal for the US DHHS [Department of Health and Human Services] grant which can be submitted by HBMC in case the AFC [AIDS Foundation of Chicago] proposal is inadequate.
4. Develop a plan, which can be implemented immediately, to increase Benefit and Foundation Income to the levels set forth in HBMC's 1987 budget.
5. Monitor HBMC's billings on Federal, State, and City grants to ascertain that billing is timely and reimbursement is maximized.⁸⁶

What progress the Board imagined that the new ED could make in his first week on increasing event and foundation funding, clearly below budgeted levels, is unclear. However, the level of responsibility placed on this one individual to “fix” broader organizational problems reflects the corporate-style desire for a dynamic, entrepreneurial leader who will “take control.”

It is critical to analyze this kind of organizational dysfunction in the context of the AIDS crisis: an organization grappling with stunning and terrifying

⁸⁵ Jerry Tomlinson, Resignation Letter to Board of Directors, emphasis in original.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

need, having to navigate for the first time a public benefits system wholly inadequate to the task, and the grief and numbness of the daily deaths of friends, clients, lovers, and co-workers. One funding proposal noted that while the government standard was that each case manager have 30-40 clients, Howard Brown case managers had a caseload of 80-90 Persons With AIDS (PWAs).⁸⁷ In the archival record, amidst memos about resignations, firings, management training, executive consultants, and strategic planning, were monthly surveillance reports on AIDS-related deaths. As of 1987, 58% of those who had AIDS were dead. In January through July of 1987, 22% of Howard Brown's clients died.⁸⁸ The precarity of Howard Brown's institutional infrastructure in many ways reflected the precarity of Howard Brown's clients, and the demise of the social safety net that exacerbated both.

In the wake of Tomlinson's departure, the board hired an outside management consultant to help them engage in another round of organizational restructuring (having, according to Tomlinson, just undergone a fairly unsuccessful restructuring). A handwritten list in a folder entitled "Management Consultant" lists "raw issues," including: "no mgmt. leadership," "too much Board meddling," "no goals," "no staff input in decisions (the 'little people' syndrome)," "poor community PR," "no set policies and procedures," and "unrealistic expectation of staff member effort." Beneath this list is another, entitled "real issues." It reads:

1. Lack of clearly designed mission statement from BoD, backed up by clear strategic plan and specific management and budgetary objectives.

⁸⁷ Annual Report, 1990. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

⁸⁸ PWA Client Population Data, July 31, 1987. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

2. Need to develop employee position charters (not job descriptions) outlining how each position feeds into Clinic annual plan.
3. Compensation tied directly to performance against approved plan, with quarterly review and deficiency analysis.
4. Policies and procedures designed to minimize bureaucracy and maximize service to client.
5. Revised volunteer policies and procedures to match assignments to highest possible use of individual talents.
6. Volunteer stroking.
7. Service to clients - MAKE THEM NUMBER ONE!!
 - i. Let no person or procedure supersede this policy!
8. Intensive training in management skills for SMS concurrent with development of management plan.
9. Managing change takes precedence over technical work.
10. PLANNING – ORGANIZATION LEADING CONTROLLING⁸⁹

This list is interesting for a number of reasons. First, there was clearly an acknowledgement of how difficult it was to work at Howard Brown during this period, of how overburdened the staff was and how low their morale. And further it's clear from this list that members of the leadership team genuinely wanted to improve the experience of clients of HBMC, recognizing that the impact organizational dysfunction had on clients was the most critical failure. The key evidence it provides, however, is of a strongly neoliberal set of answers to the problems listed under "raw issues." This document imagines that the problems faced by this organization – problems endemic to the non-profit structure – can be solved by better management training, by tying pay to performance, by streamlining bureaucracy to make operations more efficient, and by setting specific management and budgetary objectives. This list reflects broader discursive trends that are, by now, quite familiar: a mistrust and disdain for everything

⁸⁹ HBMC Operational Issues, Photocopy of hand written document on lined paper, undated, in box with 1987 materials and in a folder entitled "management consultant." Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

bureaucratic, fetishization of management techniques, streamlining, efficiency, and “achievable objectives.”

The adoption of this set of rhetorics is uneven over the course of the decade, but is most clearly evident in HBMC’s efforts to develop their fundraising and development systems. In 1984 HBMC submitted a proposal to the Chicago Resource Center requesting funding to assist their transformation into a “professional corporate foundation, [with] major donor fundraising capability.”⁹⁰ They also requested funding in the same proposal to “enable HBMC to develop a comprehensive strategic plan which will allow quality service to be delivered in a structured, cost effective manner.”⁹¹ Their objective was:

To initiate a professional corporate, foundation, and major donor fundraising capability, including the development of a multi-faceted fundraising strategy, in order to provide a broader base of funding for the operation and expansion of services to the gay and lesbian community. During its years of service, HBMC has depended heavily on the gay and lesbian community for financial support of its charitable services. It is money from this source that has financed rent subsidy and patient emergency fund programs. Public contributions have provided the capital necessary to enter contractual arrangements with government agencies which have taken as long as nine months to reimburse for expenses incurred.

The projected service needs mandate HBMC change its funding base through the hiring of a full time development manager who can be given the tools to implement a program. Major donor solicitation as well as foundation/corporate exploitation require particular expertise and talent. ... HBMC believes that a professional, objective-oriented approach will be necessary to meet the needs of persons with ARC [AIDS-Related Complex] and AIDS and the gay and lesbian community. In these times of new and formidable challenges to the well-being of these people, it is mandatory that thoughtful, well-conceived strategies be developed.⁹²

⁹⁰ Proposal to the Chicago Resource Center, undated, in box with materials from 1984 and 1985. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

The proposal ends with the statement: “The problems are great, ever-changing and growing; models for response are non-existent.” This is, of course, untrue. The objectives put forth by HBMC followed a well-established social service model, albeit one undergoing a significant period of neoliberal transformation in that period. The context of AIDS was new, but the model on which HBMC chose to model its response was not. This proposal reflects the limits of HBMC’s original financial model. Medical research funding could not support the kinds of services the organization wanted to provide to PWAs – emergency rent subsidies, social and psychological support, and case management assistance navigating the many public benefits systems. Instead, over this period, HBMC turned its focus to developing major donors, soliciting corporate sponsorships, holding major gala fundraisers, and significantly expanding its foundation funding base. Immediately following Tomlinson’s resignation, the board embarked on an effort to conduct management training throughout the organization, and then hired an executive search firm to find the next Executive Director according to these newly entrenched values.

Throughout the 1980s they attempted various fundraising ideas, while increasing the professionalization of their development systems. One unsuccessful fundraiser from the late 1980s is informative. HBMC sold many fewer than expected tickets to a benefit performance of a play (ironically titled) “Other People’s Money,” and the development department presented a report analyzing the failure of the event. The event, they write, was intended to appeal to “the low-end HBMC supporter,” priced, as it was, “under

\$50.”⁹³ They assessed that this event did not interest their “low end” supporters, concluding that the “low end HBMC supporter does not appear to be interested in the mid-priced event (\$40-50 range)” because the “price may still be seen as ‘expensive’ by the low-end target.” They concluded with a set of recommendations, writing:

While we realize the need to include low-end events in the HBMC “marketing mix”, experience ... indicates that our low-end supporter is not collectively interested in supporting mid-priced events. Specifically, we recommend that we do the following:

- 1) To reinforce our commitment to all levels of our financial constituency, we should continue to emphasize that HBMC DOES offer low price events (Blades-for-AIDS cutathon, Voguer’s Ball)
- 2) We should NOT execute mid-priced events unless:
 - a) Out of pocket expenses can be kept to an extremely low percentage of potential income
 - b) There is an “opening/gala” aspect of the event that would indicate enormous popularity
 - c) The nature/content of the event supports the educational goals of HB (e.g, while “Hotter than July” was not a financial success, it provided strong awareness of HB and issues faced by persons living with AIDS). The “content relevance” of the performance would need to be weighed against the financial cost of the event.

Interestingly, this failure identifies a key dynamic faced by many organizations. The people who care most about the work and mission of the organization – “content relevance” – are often the least able to spend money on pricey tickets for galas and theater events. The “lessons” HB learned from this event, sadly, were that events with hefty ticket costs are where the money is – investing in rich donors and corporate sponsorships pays off in the form of revenue, while “low end” donors get short shrift.

Crafting the Fundable AIDS Narrative

⁹³ Document entitled “Theater Benefit “Other People’s Money,” undated. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Archive and Library, Chicago.

By 1990, the Board had hired a new executive director with a background in for-profit healthcare administration, and began to implement fully the more neoliberal fundraising machine that it had spent the 1980s building. 1991 saw the organization's largest fundraiser yet, a gala at suburban Arlington Race Track, entitled "An Unbridled Affair." For this event, the organization contracted with an outside event manager, who prepared for them a press packet following the event containing this article in the *Daily Herald* entitled "Arlington Party To Raise AIDS Research Funds." It read:

The fight against AIDS may soon receive an extra boost by northwest suburban residents who attend a black tie gala at Arlington International Racecourse in Arlington Heights. The track will hold a party Saturday, sponsored by Neiman Marcus Oakbrook store in Oak Brook, to benefit the HBMC clinic on Chicago's near North Side. The center is renowned for its efforts in research and support services for those afflicted with Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. The track's owner, Richard Duchossois, and comedienne Phyllis Diller have been named honorary chairmen. ...

The event is expected to draw 500 people, all with the opportunity to bid for jewels, a trip, a shopping spree and other items at a silent auction that evening. In addition, various prizes – including a 1991 Jeep Wrangler – will be raffled off.⁹⁴

One article noted that former president Gerald Ford sent three pairs of cufflinks to be raffled off. The department store Neiman Marcus hired models for the evening to roam the party adorned in jewels that party attendees could bid on. The article quotes "Barbara McClure, vice president general manager of Neiman Marcus Oakbrook," who says "that the store is pleased to sponsor Howard Brown and recognizes the acclaim that the center has earned." It goes on:

⁹⁴ William B. O'Brian, "Arlington Party To Raise AIDS Research Funds," *Daily Herald*, June 14th 1991. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago. 62

Neiman Marcus has been committed to supporting non-profit organizations that work to improve the social health and economic conditions in every community in which it has a store. McClure adds 'It's a tremendous opportunity for the people in the suburbs to help us fight a disease that is affecting people throughout the northwest suburbs and the nation.' Majsek [event coordinator for HBMC] says of the fundraiser: 'our success in being able to provide the essential services to people living with AIDS depends on the suburban population joining the fight.'⁹⁵

A fascinating instance of early corporate branding around HIV/AIDS, this is an illustrative example of an organization mobilizing a particular narrative of AIDS in order to appeal to an affluent, white, suburban wealth base in order to fund services for an urban, gay constituency reliant on a public benefits system often demonized by suburban voters.

The script of the slide show presented to attendees that evening reflects this particular narrative of AIDS. Against a backdrop of photos of clients and staff, the ED said:

With the onset of AIDS and HIV infection, the Clinic has grown in response to ever-expanding needs. ... Howard Brown has four divisions ... but the division that I want to focus on with you today is our social services division. ... At the heart of our social services division is our case management department. During 1990, direct services were provided to 716 individuals having a full diagnosis of AIDS. Our clients are primarily gay men; 71% are white, 23% are Latino or Hispanic.

In many ways Howard Brown is their lifeline to obtaining help. ... These individuals face considerable prejudice and [stigma] in their daily lives. Many are turned away by their families; some lose jobs; all must confront a life-threatening disease that is fatal to over 80% within a two year period from the time of diagnosis.⁹⁶

For this suburban audience, the Executive Director mobilizes a traditional narrative of charity and compassion, even going so far as to say that that the "lifeline" of case

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Script for video presentation for Gala at Arlington Racetrack, "An Unbridled Affair." May 18th, 1991. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

management is the “heart” of the division. The ED depicts PWAs as truly pitiable: turned away from family, dying, and Howard Brown, their beacon of light in the darkness. The speaker closes the presentation with this entreaty: “To face today’s needs – and prepare for tomorrow’s challenges – we need to depend on support from individuals and businesses throughout the Midwest to come to our aid. With your support we can keep our promise to lead the fight against this disease until a cure is found.” In the background the slideshow closes with an image of a clear donation box with coins and dollar bills in it, with the words “Your Money Helps In the Fight Against AIDS” printed in black letters on it.⁹⁷ This narrative of AIDS allows wealthy suburbanites – people who likely supported and benefitted from the kinds of political economic policies that deepened inequality, reduced public benefits, closed public hospitals – to feel as though they are “supporting a worthy cause” as racetrack owner Ed Duffy, president of Arlington International Racecourse Ltd, said in the *Herald* article. It’s an odd trade-off: their support for such a “worthy cause” absolved those individuals and corporations from their support for policies that were literally killing PWAs living in poverty, while Howard Brown ekes out enough money to continue to offer programming that could provide some comfort and support, some emergency rent assistance, all the while allowing the underlying systems to remain unchanged. In this way they had indeed, as Larry Kramer wrote of GMHC, become “a funeral home ... helping the dying to die.”

Unlike explicitly activist organizations like ACT UP, which as Deborah Gould demonstrates, relied heavily on anger to fuel its organizing, in this period Howard Brown increasingly relied on and mobilized the traditional narratives of compassion and charity,

⁹⁷ This image is the final slide in the slide packet, its number corresponding to the number listed next to the final paragraph of script text.

even as those narratives were being retrofitted to serve as discursive logic for neoliberal reforms. So as Reagan and Bush touted the fundamental American-ness of charity as a rationale for decimating the public health, housing, and benefits systems, Howard Brown was taking up a version of the same logic in order to fund the increased demand *caused* by that state abandonment.

Whiteness, Wealth and Imagining the Community of AIDS

Dear Sir,

Enclosed is a check for \$100.00, a memorial gift in memory of our beloved son Dr. Dale E Kenerly, who passed away July 16, 1991, at the age of 36.

He was an ophthalmologist in private practice and on the staff of Northwestern University Chicago.

He worked with AIDS patients and died of AIDS.

We were informed by Dale's best friend and executor of his will that Howard Brown Memorial Clinic would have been his choice for memorial gifts.

Please send information of the HB Memorial Clinic. Who was Howard Brown? Is this clinic for work with AIDS patients and problems only? How long has it been working? Any other information you might send us will be greatly appreciated.⁹⁸

Before discussing the racialized implications of this narrative, I'd like to dwell for a moment on why and how compassion works, or *the work that compassion does*, and on the real affective connection Howard Brown mobilized and literally capitalized upon. In what was easily the most moving of archival finds, an easy-to-miss manila envelope dated from 1992 contained this letter and approximately eighty others like it,

⁹⁸ Letter, stapled to photocopy of \$100 check made out to HBMC. Contained in a manila envelope of similar letters, dated 1992. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

accompanying checks ranging from ten to three hundred dollars, given in honor of loved ones who had died of AIDS. Each letter tenderly described the connection that many who died of AIDS felt to and at Howard Brown. Another letter read:

Enclosed find a check in the amount of \$300.00 as a memorial donation in the name of my brother. Bruce's birthday is this coming Thursday ... and I wish to remember him on this day and the love he showed and shared with his family and friends. I know Bruce spoke highly of HBMC and the services and support of the staff for not only him but all people who had or are now living with HIV and AIDS.

I would appreciate it if you would acknowledge this memorial donation to my parents (and Bruce's) as this will help them through their loss and on May 12th as they think of Bruce. Thank you.⁹⁹

These letters offer us a critical insight into the affective world of giving and fundraising. It is not simply perfunctory – people *feel* and imagine into being a real sense of connection. Of course this connection is, also, strategic: a remittance form that went out in every Howard Brown newsletter often accompanied often these letters, demonstrating that Howard Brown encouraged and solicited these memorial donations. But this is not simply exploiting the grief of families and loved ones. Memorial contributions allow family members, sometimes estranged from the life of a child or nephew or family friend, to feel a sense of connection and shared purpose. One letter-writer, whose cousin died of AIDS, acknowledged and even welcomed the mechanical aspects of giving. He wrote: “I am sure you will send us reminders to donate in the future, and we plan to do so. Thanks for the good work.” While often the kind of fundraising and development strategies that I describe are pure performance on all sides, with neither party really believing what they are saying (i.e. “donors are important leaders,” “we look forward to hearing your

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

perspective” – by which the development staff really means, “we look forward to your timely donation and hope you won’t cause a fuss”), these gifts remind us of the affective framework that even those more mechanical exchanges discursively call upon.

The acknowledgement letter further demonstrates this affective dimension. Unlike the form letters intended for tax purposes that often acknowledge receipt of a tax-deductible donation, the letters sent to acknowledge these gifts were very personal. One reads:

On behalf of all of us here at HBMC – staff, volunteers, and the people living with AIDS and HIV-disease that we serve, I am writing to acknowledge receipt of a memorial donation made in the name of Bob Deveraux.

We receive much of our client services funding from individual donors ... we find little joy in memorial contributions. We realize all too frequently the loss of another beloved friend or family member. Our comfort must be found in the memories of all that we have shared with them, and in the knowledge that they will always be part of our hearts, our minds, and our souls.

Mere words at a time like this are inadequate to express our feelings. Know that we really do understand all that you have gone through, and that we empathize with you in your loss.

The men and women of HBMC hope that you find solace in your memories and that your spirit will be gladdened by the good works that will be carried out in your brother’s name.

Sincerely,
Howard Brown Development Director of Development¹⁰⁰

These very personal donation and acknowledgement letters reflect the context of grief and loss, but also the context of broader social abandonment felt by those who loved people with AIDS. They also reflect the class and race dynamics of charitable giving, with the Development Director calling on the same narrative of compassion – “we hope

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, Acknowledgement Letter.

your spirit will be gladdened by the good works that will be carried out in your brother's name" – that the script at the suburban gala relied upon. Such narratives work because people *do* have feelings about them; their spirits *are* gladdened.

This mode of fundraising, however, also supports and facilitates the narrative of charity and volunteerism that Reagan and Bush, Sr. mobilized to support the privatization of public institutions. These privatization schemes were having immediate negative effects on PWAs and organizations serving them, Howard Brown included. A decade of closures of public hospitals, public housing, and major cuts to the Community Development Block Grant program meant that there was no longer any safety net to prevent people from dying homeless and in poverty. Organizations like Howard Brown, whose client base was primarily white and middle class, and consequently never had to navigate the public benefits system with its clients prior to the AIDS crisis, was therefore left scrambling to piece together various remaining benefits and programs with its own emergency relief. Howard Brown supported the creation of Chicago House, the first housing program for homeless HIV positive people and PWAs.¹⁰¹ It also publicly opposed the state's regressive AIDS-related legislation, which included mandatory testing for prison inmates and those seeking marriage licenses, and it refused to give the names of those it tested despite the state authorizing public health officials to collect identifying information of anyone tested HIV positive.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Letter to Bette Jackson, Executive Director of AIDS Foundation of Chicago. April, 1986. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

¹⁰² Howard Brown, did, however decide to begin offering testing for those applying for marriage licenses at a marked-up rate as an additional revenue stream. "Job Search Firm hired to find new HB director," *Chicago Outlines*, January 14, 1988. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

But its response to these policing gestures was contradictory. On the one hand, staff clearly believed that HBMC had a responsibility to fight actively on behalf of PWAs. In his July 1987 monthly report to the Board, the Executive Director shared his conviction that Howard Brown should refuse to share the names of HIV positive patients. He wrote: “I have also said that we would not report names. I recognize that this is a Board policy decision; but, events required that I address the subject.”¹⁰³ Clearly aware that he had overstepped his power in making that decision, or at least the Board might feel that he had, he provided justification for that refusal: “the community expects HBMC to take a proactive stance on issues affecting the gay community – it puts us in a leadership position.”¹⁰⁴ But the following document in the archive, dated the same month, seems to indicate that the Board’s response to the Executive Director’s small rebellion was to shore up the “non-political” nature of the organization. The Bylaws Committee met that very month, likely in response to this action, to review and modify the bylaws to ensure that they obeyed the statutes restricting the political involvement of tax-exempt organizations. In the minutes for that meeting the committee reported:

For legal reasons, the statement shall remain in the Bylaws that provides “that the corporation shall not participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office.” The Committee discussed whether this statement should be extended to cover all political matters and determined that, for the time being, this statement was sufficient. Some thought was given to the possibility of establishing a separate corporation which would lobby actively on behalf of the constituency and goals of the Clinic, though no recommendation is being made on this point.

The Bylaws Committee recommended that the Personnel Committee, consistent with the consensus arrived at during the Board retreat in March,

¹⁰³ Executive Director Report to the Board of Directors, July 1987. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

1987, develop a policy regarding HBMC employee participation in political campaigns. The Bylaws Committee also recommended that the Clinic re-emphasize the decision-making process on matters with political implications, noting the Board (or its Exec Committee) must approve all policy statements before they are made public.¹⁰⁵

The final sentence, re-emphasizing the exclusive power of the Board of Directors to make decisions on “matters with political implications” is clearly a rebuke of the Executive Director for exceeding his authority by taking a political stance without the approval of the Board.

This hesitance to advocate vocally for policy change is understandable, given the scrutiny organizations like Howard Brown were under. How could it have done so, while simultaneously begging for funds from the very people those policies benefitted? But not only did they not advocate for particular policy changes, they did not, at any point, begin to address the systemic causes of the crisis – not the disease itself, but the state abandonment, privatization, and anti-poverty policies that turned the disease into a targeted weapon. Even as Reagan and Bush touted the fundamental American-ness of charity as a rationale for decimating the public health, housing, and benefits systems, Howard Brown was taking up a version of the same logic in order to fund the increased demand *caused* by that state abandonment.

The Imagined Community of AIDS: Race and Deservedness

The power of the narratives of AIDS mobilized in the previous two funding appeals lies in their ability to imagine into being a community of PWAs, a community of

¹⁰⁵ Bylaws Committee Meeting Minutes, July 1987. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

fellow travelers, friends, lovers, family, volunteers, and donors. A community that was critical to how Howard Brown imagined itself, to the story it told about itself, and on whose behalf donors imagined themselves to be contributing. It did *not*, however, reflect the actual community of people with AIDS in Chicago. Howard Brown, located as it is on Chicago's nearly all white north side, served a client population that was disproportionately white and affluent, compared to the overall population of PWAs. In numerous grant proposals, however, HBMC described its racial make-up as mirroring the demographics of PWAs, but this math only worked according to a particular narrative of AIDS: one that imagined African Americans as primarily exposed to HIV through injection drug use rather than same-sex sexual behavior.

The narrative that HBMC told about its client population was this: they had been upstanding, employed, tax paying, out gay men, who then, once struck down with HIV and reduced to poverty as they were no longer able to work, were forced to rely on a public benefits system inadequate to their needs. This is hauntingly familiar to anyone conversant with the markedly different discourses around social security and TANF, both of which are public benefits, but one – social security – made sacrosanct by the racialized moral economy of deserved-ness that surrounds it, while the other – TANF – constantly under threat and maligned as fostering a “culture of dependence.” This discourse similarly relies on the notion of the deserving poor, someone who had paid into the system, and deserved to draw on it when they were disabled through no fault of their own. This was of course in contrast to the ever popular “welfare queen” and other racialized symbols of the *undeserving* poor: lazy, dependent, and unemployed. A memo from the director of the HBMC social services department to the ED and the Board

advocating for continued funding for emergency financial assistance for PWAs depicts this narrative. In it, he writes:

The provision of even \$200 every 90 days meets a critical need for a large percentage of our clients. ...

In assessing the value of this component of the Social Services program, it is important to be cognizant of the financial predicament many PWAs find themselves in.

In sum, the \$200 grant allows the client to supplement his severely reduced income just enough to meet fundamental human needs. It may allow him to catch up on rent, buy adequate food, pay his health insurance premiums, take care of non-reimbursed medical bills, or buy a monthly CTA pass.

The cessation of the program will have unfortunate consequences to our overall AIDS service package. Although we have an outstanding group of emotional support services, most people in crisis must first meet basic needs before being able to appropriately utilize less tangible services.¹⁰⁶

This narrative describes someone who was employed until they were no longer able to work, and who needs financial assistance to pay for necessary life expenses. The client is imagined to be savvy with money, reasonable, not greedy, and unfairly excluded from the workforce, in marked contrast to the way other welfare recipients are discursively constructed as gaming the system. It is worth noting that this kind of emergency financial assistance would never be offered by Howard Brown to homeless youth clients of the Broadway Youth Center. In fact, the impetus for this memo was the impending closure of this program, an outcome which the Social Services Director warns would harm Howard Brown's image in "the community." He writes: "Our financial assistance program does help solve the most pressing day-to-day problems and thus serves as a primary, concrete reminder of the value of HBMC's overall PWA services. The positive PR value we

¹⁰⁶ "re: Financial Assistance to PWAs," Memo from Director of Social Services to Executive Director, July 15 1987. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago 72

generate through this service will not only be lost if it ceases, but may indeed reflect very negatively on us.”¹⁰⁷ He goes on to entreat the board to “let the community know of our plight (detailing need, expenses, etc, via press release or similar medium) and solicit donations vigorously for the sole purpose of continuing this program.”¹⁰⁸ It is not only important that the organization would provide such no-strings-attached financial assistance, but that they believed the community would support it, which clearly they did. Were the client population of Howard Brown less white, as it is in their Broadway Youth Center programs, it is very doubtful that the community would support such financial assistance, no matter how critical in the lives of clients. “The community” supported a program like this because of how “the community” was imagined – primarily, but not exclusively, white, middle-class, north-side, and gay-identified.

In his work on the conflation between race and risk, historian Timothy Stewart Winter describes the impact of race, segregation, and the discourse of risk on HIV positive people of color in Chicago. He describes the great “conflation” between race and risk group, allowing men who have sex with men to be understood as code for white, and injection drug user to be code for African American.¹⁰⁹ Howard Brown believed their client demographics were appropriate to the population of PWAs because they understood people of color to be at risk primarily because of injection drug use, although this was not, in fact, the case.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Timothy Stewart Winter, “Devastating Stigma and Unexpected Intimacies,” conference paper at the Critical Ethnic Studies Association, September 2013.

¹¹⁰ Timothy Stewart Winter, *Raids, Rights, and Rainbow Coalitions: Sexuality and Race in Chicago Politics, 1950-2000*. (Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2009). 73

This reliance on the racist crack hysteria of that period is clearly evident in an internal memo entitled “Minority Outreach Program,” which had the goal of “[educating] Gay/Bisexual and heterosexual individuals about AIDS and safe sex practices, targeted to and in minority communities.”¹¹¹ The first aspect of this program, apparently, was to identify “cultural factors” for each “minority” community. For “Blacks,” the four so-called cultural issues were: “1. Drug abuse,” “2. Teen pregnancy,” “3. Strong influence of the Baptist Church,” and “4. Strong influence of the family.” Similarly for “Hispanics,” the “cultural issues” were also drug abuse, strong influence of the family, the “language barrier,” and the “strong influence of the Catholic church.”¹¹² In an astonishingly blatant bit of racism, the action steps to be taken to address these barriers were to: “identify and approach black and Hispanic clinic employees (Mike and Tim, etc) who would be able to make referrals to associates or friends interested in volunteering.”¹¹³ According to this program African American and Latino people were already imagined to be first IV drug users, confined, if they were also men who had sex with men, by their strong family ties and religious identities. In the case of African American’s perceived issue with “teen pregnancy,” they were presumed to be always already heterosexual, as well.

What was left out of this narrative, of course, is that absent social service organizations like Howard Brown, in the wake of the demise of the public health system wrought by Reagan, family and faith institutions were often the only sources of care and support available. Rather than being evidence of a not fully “gay” identity, representing cultural “issues,” the importance of family and faith institutions to HIV positive people of

¹¹¹ Minority Outreach Program, undated. Howard Brown Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

color is actually evidence of the racism of organizations like Howard Brown and the disproportionate impact that the closure of public facilities have on people excluded from private healthcare organizations whether through poverty or geography. Stewart Winter reports that 1/3 of all people with AIDS were treated at Cook County Hospital and that of those, a full 70% were people of color. Stewart Winter describes how the decade of hospital closures under the Reagan administration had “disconnected south and west side communities from health care and drug and alcohol treatment,” further exacerbating their risk of HIV. Howard Brown’s particular narrative of AIDS, a white, middle class narrative, identified the “community” as consisting of out, gay-identified, community-minded men, and consigned HIV positive people of color to a crumbling public infrastructure, imagined outside of “the community,” not a part of the story. This failure of imagination continues to resonate as we look ahead to the issue of queer youth homelessness.

Is Homelessness a LGBT Health Issue? Crisis Ordinary, Race, and “The Community”

The kind of financial support available to PWAs experiencing poverty is simply unimaginable for the youth of the Broadway Youth Center (BYC) – unimaginable that the organization would offer it or that the community would fund it. The BYC is a drop-in program for homeless youth offering basic needs services like showers and food, as well as case management, medical care, HIV testing, and a GED program. From 2006-2008 I worked at the Broadway Youth Center as a case manager. Every day, young people who came into the drop-in space would get some food, sign up for showers,

and sign up to meet with a case manager. While they waited they hung out with one another, played cards, had amazing impromptu dance competitions, and gathered supplies: underwear, hygiene necessities, make-up, blankets, and whatever other donations had been gathered that month. I met with young people in half hour increments, working with them to get a spot in one of the few youth shelters, or perhaps to run interference with a DCFS case worker, or some other figure from a system intended to help but which hurts, hurts, hurts. Often I tried to hook young folks up with mental health services or hormone access or basic healthcare. We worked together on benefits applications, getting criminal records expunged, navigating the process of registering for school when one is homeless, and, countless times, I worked with clients to track down their identifying documents, which are a necessary first step to do almost any of those things. I spent a lot of time sitting with young folks at a computer, looking for services that didn't exist or directions on how to navigate incredibly complex benefits systems that I am privileged enough to never have had to experience. Often the violence that youth faced on the street, while couch hopping, and in shelter was so immediate and traumatizing that these case management activities took a back seat to just getting through. Nearly everything in the lives of homeless young folks is more complicated, precarious, and terrifying than I – or any case manager – could “fix,” so by far the most important aspect of my job was to be one person who *saw* homeless young people – as unique, as resilient, as messy in a human way – and tried to reflect back to them that the many injustices they experienced on a daily basis were just that: *unjust*.

In many ways the Broadway Youth Center was incredibly unique – it was staffed by a group of younger people, nearly all under thirty, mostly queer identified, and

many queer and trans people of color. Youth clients gave each other haircuts, did each other's make-up, and participated in a wide array of programming, much of which they themselves developed, writing poetry, discussing police violence, discussing trans identities. There were also terrible fights between youth, constant police scrutiny, profound mental illness, and it was hot, and packed, and loud. Stuff got stolen and lice ran riot. Staff was constantly trying to de-escalate conflicts to prevent the police from being called, and refusing them access when they were called, to try and maintain the BYC as a space where youth with outstanding warrants – which are ubiquitous in the lives of homeless youth – could safely be. It was beautiful and devastating, and it reflected a reality of queer homelessness and poverty that Howard Brown has never quite known how to apprehend.

Developed in 2005, as a collaboration between Howard Brown and two homeless youth agencies (The Night Ministry and Teen Living Program), the Broadway Youth Center's development took advantage of the "hands-off approach from [the] senior management" at Howard Brown.¹¹⁴ It has become a darling of Chicago's young queer and genderqueer community and is seen as one of the few north-side LGBT programs that is multi-racial and has intersectional politics. Despite its popularity, it has received paltry support from Howard Brown. Up until this past year it was housed in a much too small space, riddled with black mold, lacking air-conditioning, with food and hygiene products provided by volunteers, where hundreds of youth would vie to get their needs met by a two person case management staff. Now, the situation is even more precarious: temporarily housed in the basement of a local church, without enough electricity to even

¹¹⁴ Jasmine, Interview with Author, July 2011.

support work stations for every staff member, let alone air conditioning. In this new temporary space, staff must pack up the entire drop-in every night so that other church groups can meet in that space in the evening, and the center is continually engaged in a battle with the Church's neighboring homeowners for a permit to continue operations.

While the BYC struggles to continue meeting the basic needs of Chicago queer homeless youth, Howard Brown is proceeding with plans to rebrand itself as a "boutique" healthcare provider to affluent, insured, LGBT people. While the BYC languishes, literally in the basement, the organization has poured millions into a new branded boutique imprint called Aris Health by Howard Brown. In what follows I examine Howard Brown's attempts and failures to wrestle queer youth homelessness into the compassion narrative on which it bases its fundraising, and the attachment people within the BYC have, nonetheless, towards their organization.

Lifeline Appeal: Feeling Crisis

The compassion narrative mobilized by Howard Brown in the mid-1980s as they turned towards individual and foundation donors got a recent workout in the form of a "lifeline appeal" launched by the organization in 2010 to cover a major budget shortfall. This appeal utilized YouTube videos by staff, clients, and volunteers in which they shared their personal story of how Howard Brown is a lifeline for them or for their community. This appeal was widely successful: it aimed to raise \$500,000 in 50 days, a huge sum for any organization; after 50 days it exceeded its goal, raising \$650,000. It did so through the skillful deployment of affect, of personal feelings for and about the organization: fear, crisis, love, solidarity, connection, and community. The BYC was

made particularly visible in the Lifeline Appeal, with videos made by youth clients, BYC staff, and donors that made particular mention of the importance of the BYC itself, rather than solely Howard Brown. In what follows I explore this moment in detail, analyzing in particular what the visibility and invisibility of the BYC in it tells us about the limits of compassion and of community, and the relationship between AIDS and homelessness in the gay imagination.

On April 26th, 2010, the *Chicago Tribune* reported that Howard Brown Health Center was under investigation by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) following allegations that they mishandled funds associated with the Multi-Center AIDS Cohort Study (MACS) grant, a long-running research project studying gay men who are HIV+ men or living with AIDS.¹¹⁵ HBHC, in partnership with Northwestern University Medical Center, was selected by the NIH in 1983 as one of five national sites, and MACS represents HBHC's longest-running research project and one of its most steady income streams. The funds associated with the project are "restricted funds," meaning that they can only be used to cover expenses explicitly budgeted and allowed for in the grant itself. In an interview, Tom, a senior member of the staff at the BYC, explains what happened:

They used restricted funds to pay for admin overhead and medical expenses. And, well, for a lot of the medical services that we don't recoup any payment for, so a lot of the monies were basically being used for general operating support for medical services. I feel like the financial mismanagement was a combination of inadequate supervision of federal funding - and to the point where it became really apparent that it was going to really heavily impact cash flow, and that's really what precipitated the lifeline appeal campaign.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Rex Huppke, "Howard Brown Under Federal Probe," *Chicago Tribune*, April 26, 2010.

¹¹⁶ Tom, Interview with Author, August 13th, 2012.

Howard Brown revealed in a statement that upwards of \$3 million was mishandled over a two-year period. In the immediate aftermath of this revelation there was a great deal of scuffling and purging of staff as the board and management tried to determine both who was responsible and who would seem responsible to donors. In the weeks following, two members of the senior administration were fired by the Board: the Executive Director immediately, and then, a few weeks later, the Development Director, who had initially been moved into the interim-ED role following the ouster of the ED. The legal counsel for Howard Brown, Anton Jones, then moved into the Executive Director role, a move about which many staff with whom I spoke expressed dismay. The financial ramifications were immediately felt. As the *Tribune* reports, “after learning of the problems, Howard Brown made Northwestern University the lead agent for the AIDS study. Jones said that the center had to give Northwestern \$539,000 to make up for money that was pulled out and used to cover other expenses. ‘We need to get that money back,’ Jones said.”¹¹⁷



¹¹⁷ Rex Huppke, “Howard Brown Faces Federal Probe,” *Chicago Tribune* (August 2018).

It was to recoup this money that Howard Brown launched its “Lifeline Appeal,” which represented the organization’s first major foray into social and new media. Development staff made short videos featuring staff, clients, and volunteers describing why Howard Brown is their “lifeline.” Accompanying each video was a message from the organization explaining the project: “These Lifeline Stories will be shared online over the coming weeks to tell the story of Howard Brown's life-preserving work and to inspire others to be a lifeline for Howard Brown! We're taking our mission and our message viral by sharing 50 Stories In 50 Days.”¹¹⁸ The affective appeal is immediately evident in the use of the word “lifeline” to describe the act of donating money. By donating money you become someone who would throw a lifeline to save someone who is drowning; this implies, of course, that if you don’t give, and Howard Brown is no longer able to do “life preserving work,” then you are implicated in the resulting deaths. The campaign collapses the individual lives that might be preserved with the preservation of the organization itself. Johnna Redmond, a freelance journalist who reported on the scandal for the local queer media, described the power of the appeal:

I really remember this urgent call going out, ...“we will close our doors, and it’s fucked up that this has happened, but we have to do something.” All these queer people who have no money, myself included, throwing money into this. It was the first time I had seen in Chicago where the mainstream gay community found common purpose with radical queers, and that was to save this organization that all of us use. Howard Brown really brings us together, our lives really depend on it. This community that is already really strained in an economic sense really strained to pull it together.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ “Lifeline – 50 stories in 50 days – Lance”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ovd3EAnR5B8>.

¹¹⁹ Johnna Redmond, Interview with Author, August 2012.

It's important to recognize that the sense of crisis mobilized in this campaign is not simply (just) a fundraising tool; the feelings expressed in the videos are clearly strongly felt, and those feelings did in fact truly resonate with the viewers who then opened their wallets. This is the importance of affect to this work, and to this project: it is not simple. Though it is used to cue a particular set of actions – donating, in particular – that does not diminish its “real-ness.” And although affect can be cued by particular narratives, it also can exceed those prescriptive narratives, as we will see. In this case in particular, as Howard Brown both authorized and released control over these stories, there is considerably more variation in the allowable narratives than would usually be available through a tightly controlled, message driven, branded fundraising campaign. In what follows I provide a close reading of a number of lifeline appeal videos to examine how affect is mobilized, and to what ends, by different actors within the Howard Brown constellation.

Nearly all of the 50 films are short, two-minute, confessional-style videos of a single individual presenting how Howard Brown is a “lifeline” for them. One of the films, though, was long enough to be split into three parts. In it, the speaker, Lance, presents his own experience of Howard Brown, a story that is perhaps the closest to the story that Howard Brown would tell about itself. In the first of three videos we get a sense of the speaker: an older, perhaps 60-ish, white gay man, recently retired from a professional career, who was out and active in the Chicago gay scene in the 1970s, before and during Howard Brown's early years. In the second video, he articulates the narrative of AIDS that is, by now, quite familiar. He says:

My name is Lance, and for the last two years I've been a volunteer in the Outreach Department of Howard Brown. ... I had a wonderful colleague

and friend ... that was my first real introduction to this terrible gay cancer. I won't go through, um, the terrible details of what Ken had to put up with. Most of you know what that was like in the early days. But Ken was the first person I lost to [AIDS]. *[begins to cry]* I lost a lot of friends to HIV and AIDS. But a remarkable thing happened; the gay community came together in a way I had never seen before. Gay guys and lesbians worked together, they were determined to do something about this - they needed somewhere to coalesce around, and where was it, it was Howard Brown. Howard Brown was there leading the way in our fight against HIV/AIDS. I was not a joiner but I admired the work of Howard Brown and these courageous gays and lesbians who were out there demanding attention, demanding answers. ... We know that it's moved from being a terminal illness to a horrible but chronic disease. I have every confidence that one day there will be a cure for HIV/AIDS. Howard Brown is in the forefront, is working, is sending out lifelines to literally thousands of people. They are alive because Howard Brown is alive to support them.¹²⁰

Lance tells exactly the kind of story you would expect from a Howard Brown fundraising appeal: a story of the cruelty and devastation of AIDS, a story of redemptive community response, a response that has turned the tide, making a cure all but a foregone conclusion. A story about lives saved. And this is not at all to diminish the power of that story or to suggest that it is untruthful: it is indeed true, for Lance and for many others. It is also, for Howard Brown, a useful story, a story with "good cash value," to borrow a term from George Henderson. Lance was not an activist, "not a joiner," but he "admired" the work. In the third part of his video, Lance becomes visibly emotional discussing the importance of Howard Brown:

When it came time for me to retire, I was very lucky to be able to stop working at a relatively early age. But I needed something to do; I started feeling useless and antsy. And I thought, "I want to do good works, but I don't want responsibilities," so I immediately thought of Howard Brown. I cannot tell you how my admiration has grown as I see the work that the people at this organization do. The lifelines are very real. Those of you who are of my generation remember what it was like before Howard Brown. Those of you who are younger than I am, I am telling you, you

¹²⁰ "Lifelines – 50 Stories in 50 Days – Lance (Part 2)"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ovd3EAnR5B8>

don't want to know that reality. We cannot let Howard Brown Health Center disappear. We have to save this organization which has saved so many of us. [*Speaking emphatically*] I am making contributions as I am able, and I love working here with these wonderful people. They inspire me, I'm moved by working with younger people who are really dedicated. And I'm asking you for *them* – they've sent out these lifelines for us, it's time for us to send lifelines back to Howard Brown. I can't tell you how important this is to me [*choked up*]. Please help Howard Brown Health Center in its lifeline project.¹²¹

In this section his emotion is palpable: he emphatically entreats viewers to donate, both so that the community never knows what it is like to again go without a LGBT health center, but also, interestingly, to protect the staff who would lose their jobs if Howard Brown shut its doors. Again, his class position is clear: he retired early and was looking for something with which to fill his time. His use of the phrase “good works” harkens back to a Christian model of charity to the downtrodden, and suggests how he understands his own involvement with Howard Brown.

But other videos present an alternative narrative, stories that point to the complexity of crisis and compassion within Howard Brown. In this analysis, I want to center the attachment that people feel to Howard Brown as an example of what Lauren Berlant calls “cruel optimism,” in which the object of one's desire is actually a barrier to their flourishing.¹²² Howard Brown, which appears to be – and is – a site of connection and a source of life-saving services is also, I argue, complicit in the systemic violences that make those services necessary. To illustrate: another video features Peanut, a young person from the BYC, an African American gender non-conforming queer person. He says:

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2011).

Hello everybody, it's Peanut again saying "Hi" to everyone out there in TV land. Let's get down to business. Howard Brown and the BYC have *helped us*. ... When I was homeless they helped me get transportation, you know the train and the bus if I needed to sleep, food to eat, a shower, condoms, it really helped us! ... They are like a lifeline to me and I just thank them all. I met Chanel [a case manager] at a church, she told me about the BYC, that I could go there show up and get food and meet people like me that was out on the streets, and I met people. And they say that you can have a family, your blood family, and it's just nothing, but you make your own family and they'll love you better than your real family. But Chanel is a good girl, and if you come to the BYC you'll meet her and she'll have your back. Chanel and the BYC is my lifeline.¹²³

In this narrative, Howard Brown is eclipsed entirely and the space and staff of the BYC are the lifelines, *they* will "have your back." But according to an informant within the BYC, Howard Brown does not have the BYC's back. When asked how all of the transition following the MACS scandal and lifeline appeal had impacted the BYC, Tom reported:

I guess we feel exploited; we're still the golden jewel of Howard Brown, but [we're] even more under-resourced. The building is falling apart; the power will go down for two and half days. Still there's no A/C in the drop-in, and so we have to create a protocol about what to do when it's making people sick because it's so hot and we have to close. There are no resources and no one cares.¹²⁴

Now two years hence, with the BYC even more precariously housed in a church basement, its physical resources even poorer, fighting a battle even to continue to occupy the church basement within the gentrifying neighborhood – a battle that could have been avoided had Howard Brown invested in a new space for the drop-in program – that sense of exploitation and frustration has only intensified.

Cruel Attachments: Love and Betrayal

¹²³ "Lifeline – 50 Stories in 50 Days," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOkGrGjUpJE>

¹²⁴ Tom, Interview with Author, August 2012.

A number of interviews with staff of the Broadway Youth Center revealed that they shared the strong sense that the BYC was exploited for fundraising purposes but that the money never made it back to the programs and services of the BYC. One informant described how they had to fend off a never-ending stream of fundraising ideas that would exploit the stories of BYC youth for financial gain. The informant described how, *in a job interview*, a candidate for a fundraising position – a person who was actually hired – described a fundraising idea that is straight out of the most paternalistic model imaginable: “in her interview the idea she had for building community with queer homeless youth was that they would get donated paper bags and youth will make cranes and sell them at the Brown Elephant [resale shop] for a dollar. Everything is a joke. The BYC reminds us what a joke everything is and how sad that is.”¹²⁵ This marketing scheme, used to represent and commodify the suffering of everything from child cancer victims to starving children to, apparently, queer homeless youth has its roots in the most paternalistic and voyeuristic forms of charity. Through the production and sale of little paper cranes, wealthy donors can literally consume the pitiable tragedy of those that they are “saving.” Further, by taking up a strategy that has most often been used to commodify third world suffering, the same hands-off affective stance that has typified US responses to hunger in the Global South can be imported to distance wealthy donors from the effects of ravaging inequality just down the street from their condo. This desire to sell the suffering of BYC youth to raise money felt, to my informant, like a clear red flag, but the individual was hired nonetheless. How could that new hire represent the interests of the BYC, and fundraise on its behalf, when the BYC works with young people who don’t fit

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

the model of “deserving victim?” For that informant, who was sharing their sense of the mood at the BYC, everything is a cruel joke: it would be funny if it weren’t so sad. If people’s lives didn’t depend on the services they struggle to provide.

It is with no small sense of irony that BYC staff describes their precarious housing situation: a homeless homeless youth service. One of the case managers, Montana, reflects on this cruel irony:

The BYC should never have been unstably housed. Everyone knew the lease was ending at the end of 2012, and I can’t blame one specific individual. It was about having an interim CEO and having a board that didn’t understand why the BYC’s mission is critical, and the main operation person was fired; there’s literally twenty different reasons why the BYC became homeless that are connected to forty different individuals. The crisis could have been averted. ... But because there was so much crisis ... the space was wholly ignored in terms of its physical needs. So it was unsafe and unhealthy a lot of the time, which perpetuated a lot of the crisis at the BYC, this is a regular way of operating.¹²⁶

Despite this betrayal by the parent organization, the staff of the BYC continued to invest, even as they became burnt out, frustrated, and cynical. One long-time staff member, Shelby, finally decided it was time to quit. I asked her to take me through that process. When did she know it was time?

When we moved from the permanent location, and we worked really really hard to ensure there was no stoppage in service, even if it meant rolling stuff out every day, [I thought], we could do that for six months. But then it became apparent [that] there was just no investment in finding a space. And I was just driving around the neighborhood looking for church basements, and I was in survival mode: if I don’t find something, critical services will be cut, we’ll have to return money, staff positions will be cut, and so I found this church basement. ... But it was a hundred year old building with no central air and we would need to pull water, and there was no investment to make this happen. The moment I had was when I walked into the drop-in space and it was maybe a hundred and five degrees and we couldn’t even put window units in because the electricity

¹²⁶ Montana, Interview with Author, April, 2013.

couldn't handle it, and we just had fans that were super fucking loud. And there was a young person with as little clothes on as possible laying on the tile floor to cool themselves off, and that was the moment that I was so disgusted and angered, and I was like, "I can't condone what the larger organization is doing to young people." I just had this feeling that I can't keep anyone safe, I can't keep youth safe, ... and meanwhile cops were trying to get in the front door because they were trying to get to a young person, and just at every exit there was some metaphor for institutional violence.¹²⁷

This relocation would not have had, in and of itself, such a great impact, she said, had it not come after years and years of existing in a crisis atmosphere. What were they doing instead, if they weren't looking for new spaces?

Based on interviews and coverage in the local gay press, it's clear that in the wake of the MACS financial scandal, the new Executive Director intensified the organization's investment in neoliberal tactics of efficiency, branding, messaging, and technological systems. New systems were created to fix problems – particularly the immediate fiscal distress and the widespread image problem – but the existing problems of under-resourced programs, overburdened staff, and a need that far outpaced the capacity of the organization went un-answered. Instead, the ED focused on making the organization *seem* efficient and capable, primarily through the use of technology. Tom reported that "he's trying to clean house. 'It's a new day!' The messaging I'm getting is that it's important to build a corporate medical model, almost like a University Medical Center."¹²⁸ In the year after the scandal, Howard Brown posted a budget surplus, but according to Tom, it was made possible by "programmatic under-resourcing, so we can see how we're getting this surplus, but it comes at the cost of the programs

¹²⁷ Shelby, Interview with Author, July 2013.

¹²⁸ Tom, Interview with Author, August, 2012.

themselves.”¹²⁹ Despite this programmatic under-resourcing, Howard Brown expanded its use of technology and even hired a PR firm. According to Tom, “you know there’s an *interim logo*. We all cracked up about that. . . . Everything is a joke. . . . There’s a new mission statement, but no one knows what it is. It’s *interim*.”¹³⁰

For staff on the frontlines, the PR haggling over the messaging of the interim mission is far removed from the life and death struggles experienced by the clients with whom they work, and evidence that Howard Brown as an organization doesn’t know or care about those struggles. It is in the context of that struggle that Howard Brown’s discordant “solutions” focused on management technologies become so cruelly ironic.

Tom describes:

There’s a new person, a friend of the ED’s, who was hired for some unspecified senior position involving technology. His big projects have so far involved getting all of the senior staff tablets, so that everyone comes into meetings and all the senior staff have tablets and no one else does. The BYC has two ipads for a research project and they spend 23 hours a day locked in the safe.

The other project is that he wanted to increase confidentiality in the waiting room so he got these Olive Garden-style vibrating discs, which of course don’t work, they just sit in the basket on the counter vibrating all the time. So they numbered them, and now someone takes a vibrating disk with a number on it and they call out the number. So it’s basically four hundred dollar numbers that could be laminated pieces of paper.¹³¹

For the staff and clients of the BYC, who are so immersed in a world of immediate crisis, homelessness, and poverty, working alongside youth struggling to find a meal, struggling to find a place to sleep that night, dealing with the immediate and long term effects of terrible violence, and negotiating demeaning and diminishing social service programs –

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

people for whom there are simply no good options anywhere – to see these hair-brained schemes must be absolutely crazy-making.

I asked Shelby, the long-time BYC case manager, about the toll of these wacky schemes amid the constant neglect of the program she worked so hard for. She described the long-term impact of years of grappling with crisis, both in the work with youth and within the organization itself. “I don’t even know how to describe the physical and psychological toll, because it was severe,” she said. “There were days where I would just spontaneously start crying, and I couldn’t get it together, and I would have to leave [the drop-in space]. Do you remember LaTanya?” I did. A young African American woman, poised, quiet. She had a toddler that she often brought up to the space with her. Not one of my case management clients, but I remember her around the space; she had been coming to the BYC since long before I was hired. I asked Shelby to jog my memory: “She worked with you, right?” For years, Shelby said. She went on:

She had a son who was killed, and then she committed suicide the next year. And it was a big turning point for me. For feeling broken. I can’t do it. Spending all night at the BYC doing paperwork, it was just totally unsustainable. It was one hundred percent crisis all the time, but about people’s real actual lives rather than about personnel issues, which are crises, but not.¹³²

She paused for a moment. But, she said, “*I would do it all over again*. I don’t know what that means.”¹³³ Shelby spoke many times in our conversation about staying, in large part, because she felt that if she didn’t stay and continue to pressure Howard Brown to support the BYC they would cut the program.

¹³² Shelby, Interview with Author, July 2013.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

In an interview with a former manager of the BYC, Maleeka, who left her position some years ago now, she reflected on that phenomenon among staff. “You don’t appreciate how unhealthy it could be until you’re gone,” she said. “I had a very special moment when I realized I don’t need to carry Howard Brown on my shoulder, and lots of people on front lines or mid-level management are trying to carry it on their shoulders, or buffer young people, or be there because maybe no one else would be.”¹³⁴ This is one aspect of the cruelty of our attachments to non-profits. She explained: “You can sacrifice all you want to protect young people, but they [management] are having conversations about the BYC that you are not involved in, so it could be ripped away at any moment.”¹³⁵ The Broadway Youth Center illustrates the degree to which, even amidst crisis, something important, something life sustaining, happens. Yet that space is so precarious, and those moments so fleeting. Montana reflects:

What makes the work with young people hard is the, um, the continuous operating out of scarcity. There might be a flash of abundance, and it would be like “this could completely revolutionize the work if we had what we needed, or that there were housing options that were more effective or plentiful.” You know? I think that what also makes it hard is that in the non-profit system the priority is never the young people, but the preservation and protection of the non-profit system itself.¹³⁶

These flashes of abundance, when you could imagine what it would be like if there were actual resources that young folks could be connected to, keep people fighting for a little bit more here, a little bit more there, a grant to cover one more program. This is of course why compassion is useful for the neoliberal state: it occupies those people made surplus by the changing economic system – those who would be most likely to rise up and

¹³⁴ Maleeka, Interview with Author, March, 2012.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Montana, Interview with Author, April 2013.

demand change – with the never-ending task of surviving, and occupies those who would fight alongside them in a never-ending quest to find *just one more grant* to try and ensure that such survival is possible.

Conclusion

*Across diverse geopolitical and biopolitical locations, the present moment increasingly imposes itself on consciousness as a moment in extended crisis, with one happening piling on another.*¹³⁷

- Lauren Berlant

Though most of the Lifeline Appeal videos narrate crisis in order to appeal to the compassion of donors, one lifeline appeal seemed to recognize and gesture towards the profound inequalities that underlie the appeal and the organization more broadly. Chanel, who was named as the staff member who would “have your back” in Peanut’s video, read from a prepared statement for her video. She said:

Dear friends and family and community. I love my work with young people and I love my work at the Broadway Youth Center. ... It’s a place for young activists and movement builders. I am privileged to bear witness to the magic, the hard moments, the really really really hard moments, and the small miracles that keep us struggling and loving and resisting and making it work against all odds. BYC youth are known for their resourcefulness, hilariousness, unrelenting toughness, and big loyal hearts. I learn from this every day. This is the first place that many young people come to ask us really personal and scary questions about their gender identity and sexual identity, about their bodies, about their lives. ... It’s the first place where people come after they’ve been incarcerated and need a place to get re-grounded. It’s the first place where people reach out to us for support. We’re here when people test positive and connect them to the resources they deserve. We’re here when they are scared and worried and we remind them of their resilience. We’re here when young people have nowhere to go and we safety plan and safety plan and safety plan. *I do this work because I believe that young people are amazing lifelines to each other.* Howard Brown Health Center, our committed community partners,

¹³⁷ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, p. 3.

and BYC youth have built this space collectively, *so that now there's not just one lifeline, but hundreds and probably thousands.*¹³⁸

This video explicitly rejects the idea that Howard Brown *the organization* is the lifeline, but instead describes the *people* who “have built this space collectively,” as “lifelines to each other.” She rejects the narrative that so many hold – even and especially Howard Brown donors – about homeless queer youth of color: as problems, delinquents, lazy, or the more beneficent narratives of tragic paternalism. They do not fit the compassion narrative; they are not going to make paper cranes. Instead she describes the complex personhood, the barriers, resilience, constrained agency, and individual personalities that escape and exceed those narratives. This, according both in my own experience and to the many interviews conducted with staff of the BYC, is what made the BYC difficult, both for Howard Brown to claim unreservedly and difficult to build relationships with homeowners and business owners: it refused, at least when it could, to rely on the paternalistic and pathologizing narratives that dehumanized the youth who relied upon it, who built it, who peopled it. Its refusal of the compassion narrative made it impossible for Howard Brown to apprehend, or to contain, but the freedom thereby enabled to go “off script” is little comfort when it is one hundred degrees and there are a hundred young people with little access to hygiene supplies all trying to get their needs met.

I asked Shelby to reflect on why she stayed at the BYC for so many years, despite the crisis atmosphere and neglect on the part of its parent organization. She thought for a moment, and replied:

I stayed because I really believe in my heart that there is and should be radical ways for people to have access to basic needs. ... I also recognize that there were lots of flaws and under-resourcing; there was no one day

¹³⁸ “Lifeline Appeal – 50 Stories in 50 Days – Montana,” emphasis mine

that was perfect. And I loved the group of people who were so committed to the work. To creating a safer space for young people to show up and be messy and mad and angry and beautiful and kind, and there aren't a lot of spaces that are just open, especially for GLBT young people.¹³⁹

In this chapter I have argued that for those who believe in queer non-profits, our attachment, our longing, is an example of cruel optimism. But as Shelby reflects, many who grapple in and with those spaces are not so optimistic: there are no perfect days. What is left, then, without the optimism? Only the cruel relation and the work of making do. Berlant argues that a “spreading precarity provides the dominant *structure* and *experience* of the present moment.”¹⁴⁰ Neoliberal economic transformations have produced a class of precarious, “flexible” workers, contract-based, without benefits, without union representation, with wages undercut by outsourcing; alongside this, we see the privatization of the social safety net, diminishing public institutions, and competition and scarcity among non-profit agencies. Precarity and crisis are the mode of the present.

In response to the crisis of the present, a precarity that frays fantasies of the good life, Berlant asks “what happens to optimism when futurity splinters as a prop for getting through life?” She argues that we find ourselves at an *impasse*: “managing the presence of a problem/event that dissolves the old sureties and forces improvisation and reflection on life-without-guarantees.”¹⁴¹ For Berlant, rather than simply denoting stuck-ness, an *impasse* is a way of making do. She writes:

The *impasse* is a stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wondering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things,

¹³⁹ Shelby, Interview with Author, July 2013.

¹⁴⁰ Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*. p. 192.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

maintain one's sea legs. ... The holding pattern implied in "impasse" suggests temporary housing.¹⁴²

The seeming affective contradiction that Shelby articulates, a clear-eyed indictment of the non-profit system coupled with deep hope and longing, seems to be shared by many of my informants – and is, in fact, a contradiction I often feel acutely. This contradiction embodies this impasse, one strategy for making do, for re-imagining life after the demise of the fantasy of the good life.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Chapter Two: Community and its Others: Safety, Space, and Non-Profitization

In this post-disciplinary context, discipline does not fall away. Though welfare state institutions begin to lose distinct form under internal and external pressures, this does not mark the disappearance of techniques of social control associated with schools, hospitals, prisons and the lot. Rather, accounts suggest that these techniques have become unmoored from their institutional arrangements, allowing for a more general distribution of abstract disciplinary practices across what had been known as the social. Further, in the context of the coming-to-dominance of biopolitics, the remains of disciplinary enclosures may begin to serve new functions. The opening up of enclosures, the multiplication and diffusion, suggest that the organization of the individual and its confinement in space is no longer the primary goal of disciplinary mechanisms. Rather, disciplinary mechanisms in this context may serve as flashpoints between an individual and biopolitics.¹⁴³

- Craig Willse

But what began to take shape here was a new way of demarcating a sector for government, a sector whose vectors and forces could be mobilized, enrolled, deployed in novel programmes and techniques which operated through the instrumentalization of personal allegiances and active responsibilities: government through community.¹⁴⁴

- Nikolas Rose

One of the rare formal collaborations between the Broadway Youth Center and the Center on Halsted (COH) is occasioned by Transgender Day of Remembrance, a yearly event held throughout the country to mark those trans people who did not survive the violence directed at them. The two organizations come together to host the “Night of the Fallen Stars” celebration in the Center on Halsted’s well-appointed facilities. In 2012, however, a telling conflict marred the proceedings. Just days before the event, the COH’s

¹⁴³ Craig Willse, “‘Universal Data Elements,’ or the Biopolitical Life of Homeless Populations” *Surveillance and Society* 5(3), p. 244

¹⁴⁴ Nikolas Rose, “The Death of the Social? Re-figuring the Territory of Government,” *Economy and Society*, Volume 25, Number 3, (August 1996) p. 332.

Transgender Program Coordinator resigned her position in protest of the Center's decision to accept a donation from the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) in order to "offset costs of the event."¹⁴⁵ In a letter posted to her Facebook page, Violet Stanlet, who had held the position as a volunteer for more than five years, wrote: "when the Director said to me: 'We couldn't turn down the money,' it felt like a slap in the face, not only for me, but for my community as well."¹⁴⁶ Stanlet is referring to the Human Rights Campaign's longstanding dismissal of trans issues, most recently their decision to pursue federal employment non-discrimination legislation that did not include gender identity as a protected category. After it had been the target of nation-wide protests by trans people, Violet found it particularly galling that the HRC would offer a donation in support of Transgender Day of Remembrance – and even more so that the Center on Halsted would accept it.¹⁴⁷ She wrote: "I can not be a part of putting money above principle. I can not be a part of enabling HRC's attempt to buy their way back into the Trans communities' good graces. I can not be associated with an organization which would show such disrespect for the Transgender community."¹⁴⁸ Implicit in Stanlet's critique is an assumption about "community": of whom it is comprised, where it is located, and that "it" can reasonably make demands on and be represented by the Center on Halsted.

In this chapter, I turn to what Terry Stone, Executive Director of Centerlink, a network of LGBT community centers, calls the "spirit of the community": the LGBT

¹⁴⁵ Joseph Duggan Lyons, "[Center on Halsted] Transgender Programming Coordinator Resigns in Protest." *Chicago Phoenix*, (November 15, 2012).

¹⁴⁶ Violet Stanlet, <http://www.Facebook.com/violetstanlet?ref=ts&fref=ts>, November 16, 2012.

¹⁴⁷ As evidenced by her Facebook record, Violet herself had protested the local HRC chapter's yearly gala fundraiser – the very same chapter that offered the meager \$250 donation.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

community center.¹⁴⁹ The first LGBT community centers opened in Albany, NY and LA in 1971, and since then, they have sprung up in most urban areas in the US, reflecting the emergence of the contemporary queer “community” – and the institutional formations that purportedly house it – during the time period I consider in this dissertation.¹⁵⁰ This emergence and expansion has been facilitated by a very different set of alignments than the more charity- and discipline-oriented Howard Brown Health Center of the previous chapter: the community center, in contrast, sits at the nexus of state power, yes, but even more so corporate wealth, foundation giving, and GLBT philanthropy.¹⁵¹

Whereas the previous chapter explored the affective, institutional, and disciplinary logic of *compassion*, this chapter addresses the production and management of *community*: its appeal, the mechanics of its production, the affective economies on which it relies, the moments it exceeds the terms under which it was mobilized, and the possibilities it enables and forecloses. Community, in its institutional arrangements considered in this chapter, functions according to a biopolitical rather than strictly disciplinary logic, offering a window into a scene of contestation over which bodies are of “the community,” who must be regulated, how, and for what reasons. “Community,” in the context of neoliberalism’s ever-expanding ability to incorporate particular queer

¹⁴⁹ Terry Stone, speaking at an all-day event entitled “LGBT Community Centers: Creating Community, From the Center” at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force’s Creating Change Conference, (February 3, 2011).

¹⁵⁰ Centerlink has 88 member community centers across the US and in China, Japan, Mexico, Peru, and Israel.

¹⁵¹ Here I am drawing a distinction between corporate wealth and foundation giving, although there is some significant overlap. The primary difference has to do with what the money means. While family and community foundation money comes from corporate profits, it is not given directly from the corporation itself. In contrast, corporate giving, which has increased in the period I consider, becomes part of the corporation’s marketing and brand building, part of the business model itself.

bodies into the national imaginary and technologies of control, is increasingly the logic through which some queer bodies are protected and folded into (national) life, and others are located outside the life of the nation, a threat to it, and exposed to early death. Within this framework, we can then explore the non-profit's struggle to produce something called "the LGBT community" as the bureaucratized, regulatory non-profit apparatus acting as the connective tissue between affect and the biopolitical management of life and death. The community center illustrates both sides of the "bio-necro collaboration" about which Jasbir Puar theorizes. At the Center on Halsted, some queer lives are optimized through therapy, social programs, educational offerings, job resources, and networking, while other lives are located outside "the community," and regulated through explicit relationships with the police, the on-site security guards, and conflicts over the space itself.

The Center on Halsted is, ironically enough, just down the street from the Howard Brown Health Center and its Broadway Youth Center – both are located in the gentrified Lakeview neighborhood in Chicago, or "Boystown" as it is known. But the differences between these two organizations are important. In 2007 the COH opened a brand-new "green" space, the first floor of which is rented out to a Whole Foods grocery store. The space is furnished with contemporary furniture and art and equipped with a computer center, a theater, conference rooms that are rented out for earned income, therapist offices, and a youth space – even a cubical farm in the center of the building that houses its expansive middle management. The airy and contemporary feel is somewhat at odds with the picture of homeless youth sleeping on a \$3000 dollar couch in the middle of the day, and consequently fierce and unanticipated battles have erupted over public

space, gentrification, race and racism, and homelessness, over what kinds of bodies and affects comprise “the community.”

After first exploring some of the theoretical underpinnings of my investigation of community, I investigate how the disciplining power of the charity model became fused with a new neoliberal logic of community, specifically looking at a period in the 1980s when the role of the membership of the organization shifted, and came to constitute a new “community” of donors. I then examine three instructive instances in the larger institutional efforts to produce and police “the community.” The first is a series of procedural changes undertaken by the youth program soon after the Center moved into its new space in order to more explicitly police who counted as “the community” of queer youth, and to limit the access of those deemed not a member of that community. These changes were enacted as a direct result of the increasing numbers of homeless youth of color accessing the youth programs; the sexuality of these youths was under question by the organization, and their efforts to police who did and did not belong illustrates the limits of “community” and the contestation over its boundaries. The second section traces these conflicts forward a few years, when, following a series of incidences of violence in the Boystown neighborhood and a video gone viral purporting to “capture” that violence, a campaign to “Take Back Boystown” was launched with the Center occupying center stage.

The third site of conflict within this organization that I analyze is the uneasy relationship between the community center and one of its programs, the Chicago LGBT Anti-Violence Project (AVP). In 2011 the Center’s AVP accepted an anti-sex trafficking grant from the Cook County State’s Attorney’s office despite the seeming knowledge

that it would do very little increase the safety of the young people it targets – and perhaps even further endanger them – once again illustrating the institutional structures which butt up against and enforce the limits of “community.”

Looking at the struggle of the Center on Halsted to produce and police the boundaries of community, I ask: What kinds of subjectivity, what kinds of political horizons, are imagined by these efforts to achieve “community?” What possibilities are foreclosed? How do such entreaties to “community” mobilize affect – desire, fear, hope – and to what ends? How has community, in the context of the NPIC, come to function as the bridge between affect and biopower? How does “community” function to produce – both discursively and materially – not only those that are “in the community,” and those that are not, but also those outside any imagining of community, the other Others Anna Agathangelou writes of “whose life and death do not even merit mention or attention?”¹⁵²

¹⁵² Ann Agathangelou, et al., “Intimate Investments: Homonormativity, Global Lockdown, and the Seductions Empire.” *Radical History Review* Issue 100 (Winter 2008).

Community and Neoliberal Governance

*Within a rather short period, what began as a language of resistance and critique was transformed ... into an expert discourse and a professional vocation. ... Communities became zones to be investigated, mapped, classified, documented, interpreted, their vectors explained ... and taken into account in numberless encounters between professionals and their clients, whose individual conduct is now to be made intelligible in terms of the beliefs and values of "their community."*¹⁵³

- Nikolas Rose

As I have argued, non-profits escape scrutiny in large part through a widespread affective narrative that understands them as fundamentally “good,” as constituting what David Wagner calls “the sanctified sector.”¹⁵⁴ This affective narrative is about more than the supposed “good works” undertaken in non-profits, though; this chapter analyzes how the idea of *community* is produced and lived through non-profits, and how community functions as a tool of neoliberal governance. A key part of the affective narrative that “sanctifies” the non-profit sector has to do with the kinds of citizenship imagined to exist and be fostered within such organizations. Non-profits are commonly understood to constitute “civil society,” an instructively imprecise term intended to demarcate a sector outside of the state and the market, the so-called “public square” of citizenship, debate, care, and shared American identity. This assumed location outside the market and the state is a critical component of the benevolent narrative of non-profits, obscuring, as it does, the key function of non-profits in maintaining neoliberal governance – particularly their role in both entrenching economic inequality and managing the resulting poverty.

¹⁵³ Rose, p. 332.

¹⁵⁴ David Wagner, *What's Love Got to Do With It: A Critical Look at American Charity* (New York: The New Press, 2000), p. 116.

Instead, non-profits are understood, according to Miranda Joseph, to be “a metonym” for community, with a responsibility to “shape, define, and direct that community.”¹⁵⁵

In her important book *Against the Romance of Community*, Joseph challenges this narrative, arguing that community is, in fact, critical for and constitutive of both the nation-state and capitalism. For Joseph, capitalism and, “more generally, modernity, *depend on and generate* the discourse of community to legitimate social hierarchies.”¹⁵⁶ Using Marx, Joseph demonstrates “the supplementarity of community with capital,” arguing that “social relations are implied in material relations of production,” and further that it is through community that the use value of commodities is established.¹⁵⁷ The idea of community that is nurtured and mobilized within non-profits is one key mechanism, then, through which the contemporary nation-state and neoliberal economics function.

For Nikolas Rose, community is especially salient as a form of neoliberal governance. As neoliberal multiculturalism invites a stripped-down form of inclusion in the place of substantive systemic change, individuals in marginalized groups are invited to feel their connection to the newly welcoming state through their community identification. This is the kind of self-governance that Foucault describes, in which the logics of neoliberalism become enunciated and lived at the level of subjectivity. Rose reminds us that while the idea of community certainly predates neoliberalism, it “becomes governmental, however, when it is made technical.”¹⁵⁸ Contemporary non-profits, I argue, are one key apparatus through which community is rendered technical. It

¹⁵⁵ Miranda Joseph, *Against the Romance of Community*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. xiii.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. viii. Emphasis mine.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xxxiii.

¹⁵⁸ Rose, p. 332.

is through non-profits that community can be “investigated, mapped, classified, documented, interpreted,” and, as I demonstrate, made profitable.¹⁵⁹

Queer community is an interesting example to consider, constituted, as it is, primarily through what it is not: heteronormative. This has meant that queer community has been historically positioned oppositionally to the state. However, under the cultural politics of neoliberal capitalism, some queer subjects are offered access to normativity, contingent on their participation in other neoliberal projects like policing, private property, consumption, and nationalism. Scholars like Lisa Duggan and Alexandra Chasin have illustrated this profound turn towards the market, and Chasin in particular documents the degree to which queer community has been articulated through market participation. From boycotts to “gay money,” corporate pride sponsorships, and niche advertising, LGBT community is constituted in large part through its relationship to the market. As I demonstrate in this chapter, one important mechanism through which this invitation to neoliberal belonging is issued is through the rhetorical and material remapping of oppositional groups into communities of donors. This invitation into neoliberal self-governance is an example of what Soo Ah Kwon calls “affirmative governmentality,” in which subjects are enlisted – through their understanding of themselves as community members – as willing participants in the cultural and economic project of neoliberalism.¹⁶⁰ Drawing on Foucault’s concept of governmentality as productive of subjectivity, I, throughout this chapter, analyze how particular kinds of queer subjects are produced, managed, mobilized, and policed. As access to the

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Soo Ah Kwon, *Uncivil Youth: Race, Activism, and Affirmative Governmentality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 9.

community of the non-profit is increasingly managed by economic proximity – donor or client – subjects across that spectrum are invited to understand themselves and orient themselves towards entrepreneurial self governance in an economic and cultural order in which queerness is not oppositional, but rather responsible, upwardly mobile, and *included*.

Understanding community as produced through the affirmative governance apparatus of the non-profit is not at all to say that such communities aren't "real;" on the contrary, they are powerfully real, both materially and affectively. Rose writes,

Government through community, even when it works upon pre-existing bonds of allegiance, transforms [communities], invests them with new values, affiliates them to expertise and re-configures relations of exclusion. This does not make 'communities' in some sense false. But it should alert us to the work entailed in the construction of community, and the implications of the logics of inclusion and exclusion, of responsabilization and autonomization, that they inescapably entail.¹⁶¹

What Rose points to here is not just the invitation of unity and belonging issued by the promise of community, but also the exclusions that must then also be managed. If the non-profit system is one often-overlooked apparatus through which community is rendered technical, part of that technical capacity must be articulating and policing exclusions – those who are constitutively outside of community. In her scholarship on non-profits that work with so-called "at-risk" youth, Soo Ah Kwon describes the state as "both caring and ruthless": the "powers that promote youth empowerment," she writes, "are not separate from those of youth criminalization."¹⁶² This continuity between the affirmative technologies of community belonging and the policing technologies of exclusion are an example of what Jasbir Puar describes as the "bio-necro collaboration"

¹⁶¹ Rose, p.336.

¹⁶² Kwon, p. 8.

of homonormativity.¹⁶³ Community functions biopolitically, and as the example of the Center on Halsted demonstrates, some queer bodies are targeted for living, for entrepreneurial neoliberal subjectivity, while others are understood as criminal, irredeemably deviant, and oriented towards incarceration.

The critique that I level in this chapter is not simply that queer community is exclusionary. Instead, I am interested in the mechanisms and logics of exclusion *as well as* those of inclusion. The technologies of inclusion, of affirmative governmentality, are just as deserving of scrutiny and critique. The goal is, of course, not simply to widen those technologies of inclusion to target more subjects – as they are already doing. Miranda Joseph suggests that this common feminist and queer critique of the false universality of community usually, after demarcating the exclusions, calls for greater access to community. Joseph writes: “US-based critics of identity politics have often instead pursued even more finely grained measures of authenticity, producing not a critique of community but a proliferation of communities.”¹⁶⁴ My intention in this chapter is to trace the mechanisms through which community is produced and managed in order to think through what kinds of possibilities for social movements are enabled through community and what are foreclosed.

From Charity to Community

*Communal subjectivity is constituted not by identity but rather through practices of production and consumption.*¹⁶⁵

- Miranda Joseph

¹⁶³ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

¹⁶⁴ Joseph, p. xxiii.

¹⁶⁵ Joseph, p. viii.

The Center on Halsted was founded in 1974 as Gay Horizons, a social service organization intended to meet the social, emotional, and mental health needs of Chicago's gay population. In 1996 they changed their name to Horizons Community Service, in part to side-step the ongoing conflict about whether to add "lesbian" to their name, as well as to reflect both their continuing social service orientation and their desire to become a community center. Their major early program was the gay hotline, which received hundreds of calls a month, meticulously documented, from individuals looking for everything from mental health support, to sex partners, to gay friendly electricians. By the late 1970s it began providing one-on-one and group mental health services, for which it charged a sliding scale fee, and which provided the major income stream that carried the organization through its early years. The organization began applying for its 501(c)(3) non-profit status in 1977, and received it in 1978. The speed with which the organization sought and received their tax exempt status suggests fairly significant cultural capital wielded by the founding members; the legal and financial skills necessary to navigate that bureaucratic process are quite daunting, let alone to do it so quickly. It also reveals an uncritical embrace of the non-profit form very early on. The question of *why* pursue 501(c)(3) status cannot be answered definitively by the extant archive, since the decision was in many ways a forgone conclusion – it was never debated and no other paths were considered.

This particular outlook is further illustrated by many other aspects of the organization's early history. The Board of Directors held regular meetings, which

unfailingly followed Roberts Rules of Order.¹⁶⁶ The organization adopted a fairly corporate lexicon, with “annual corporation meetings” and very formal written documentation. By 1979 they were pursuing a relationship with the Chicago chapter of the United Way, first to receive training on “proper” fundraising and non-profit management, and eventually for funding. A 1979 Board meeting documents this early turn towards traditional charity funding models:

Steven Larson and Cathy Schmidt had a meeting with a Senior Planner for The United Way to discuss planning techniques, etc. The woman from the United Way was very helpful and concerned about helping Gay Horizons, Inc. in anyway [*sic*] she could. She was somewhat optimistic about the chances of Gay Horizons getting financial assistance from the United Way. Some of the topics discussed were the necessary documentation required for funding, the purposes and programs of the organization, and budgets.¹⁶⁷

Directly following is a description of their first cocktail party fundraiser in which “the purpose would be to give a talk about Gay Horizons, Inc. and its programs then to solicit donations.”¹⁶⁸ This is a fascinating picture of the strong sense of inevitability and rightness of the turn towards traditional non-profit models. It also presents a clear picture of the impact of that funding model on documentation, programming, and financial management; in many ways the history and vision of this organization, like all of the others in this dissertation, was written for funding purposes, and so is fundamentally shaped by an idea of what is “fund-able.”

In 1979 the first Gay Horizons youth program began, following the solicitation of “professionals” to serve as group leaders. Also in 1979 the first mentions of a community

¹⁶⁶ For instance at the January 3, 1979 meeting: “Gloria read the minutes of the Executive Committee meeting. Joe Shure moved that we approve those as written, motion passed.”

¹⁶⁷ Feb 21, 1979, Joe Loundy Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

center appear in the notes, although that is a vision not to be realized for another 25 years. I am interested in *why* the community center was envisioned, especially for a social service organization that was very clearly rooted in the charity model. While there is clearly a sense of affinity based on identity, especially, and really only, among white gay men, the idea of community did something else for Gay Horizons: it produced and mobilized a group of donors who understood themselves to be “the community.” The example of Gay Horizons and its eventual transition into the Center on Halsted illustrates very clearly Miranda Joseph’s claim that community is a process of production and consumption.

Throughout the late 1970s and into the early 1980s board meetings reflect a desire for greater funding in order to expand programmatic offerings and hire more than one part time staff person. In a 1985 grant application to the Chicago Community Trust, the organization reports on the re-organization of the Board of Directors undertaken in 1983 and 1984. They write:

In the spring of 1983 the Board of Directors was reorganized from representatives of our programs and external gay and lesbian organizations to permit us to recruit individuals committed to and capable of Board work, that is, financial development, agency and financial management, planning and evaluation and public communications. The reconstituted Board has designed a financial development plan, kicked off in December with a hearteningly successful membership drive, which will enable Horizons to be self-supporting after three years.¹⁶⁹

There are two important shifts happening here: the first is a transformation on the Board and the second is a transformation in the organization’s understanding of its membership, both of which reflect a marketization of community. The grant narrative describes the

¹⁶⁹ Grant Application Narrative to the Chicago Community Trust, 1985. Joe Loundy Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

prioritization of recruiting individuals “committed to and capable of Board work.” In order to achieve the results they desire, they believe this means greater access to wealth, which would enable greater fundraising – what they are calling “financial development” – and the skills afforded by cultural capital to manage that wealth. Prior to this 1983 re-organization, the Board of Directors had been composed primarily of gay social workers and other mental health professionals. These individuals had, in the early years of the organization, worked the hotline and provided the individual and group counseling that were the core programs of the organization. The 1983 re-organization is an explicit turn, not necessarily *away* from this social service framework, but *towards* a new community of wealth.

This new orientation on the Board of Directors is further illustrated in 1985, in which during the March Board meeting one member, in referring to the year-end financial report, remarked that “financial development must be the top priority of the Board in the coming year. All Board members, in addition to their other committee and project activities, will be expected to support all Horizon’s fundraising activities.”¹⁷⁰ By 1992, qualifications for membership on the Board of Directors included “regular, personally significant financial gifts to Horizons, according to one’s means.” A second qualification for all board members was to “implement agency fund-raising strategies through personal influence with community contacts, including individuals, foundations, government agencies, corporations, etc.”¹⁷¹ This prioritization of personal wealth and networks of wealth as a qualification for Board membership was, of course, not unique to

¹⁷⁰ Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, March 1985. Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

¹⁷¹ Qualifications for Board Members, 1992. Joe Loundy Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

Gay Horizons; the Howard Brown Memorial Clinic was undergoing a similar re-organization of its Board of Directors during this time period. What is unique, however, is how this re-organization played out on the level of membership, changing the understanding of the wider community of the organization.

In the 1985 grant application to the Chicago Community Trust, the re-organization of the Board to prioritize financial acumen and access was illustrated by the Board's new financial development plan, "kicked off in December with a hearteningly successful membership drive."¹⁷² This is not the first slippage between member and donor, but it is a significant one. In its early years, Gay Horizons was constituted by a membership of volunteers who staffed the hotline, offered counseling services, did filing and administrative tasks, and kept up the office space. Managing the great number of volunteers was clearly a main administrative challenge for the Board, and, once they were hired, for staff. The bylaws contained in their 1977 application for 501(c)(3) status made a distinction between "program members" and "general members": people who are active participants – volunteers or participants in programs – and those who simply pay "yearly dues of not less than \$1.00."¹⁷³ Volunteers were considered members, and for a period in the early 1980s, minutes from every board meeting were even sent to every member in a gesture towards transparency.¹⁷⁴ Following the re-organization of 1983-

¹⁷² Grant Application, Chicago Community Trust, 1985. Joe Loundy Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

¹⁷³ Application for 501(c)(3) status, filed 1977. Joe Loundy Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

¹⁷⁴ This new transparency initiative was instituted by the Executive Committee in 1980 in response to an increasingly fractious membership. The organization had recently chosen to seek and accept funding from the Hugh Hefner Foundation, angering what few lesbian members the organization had. The notes of the Executive Committee meeting following a community meeting to discuss the Hefner Grant and decide whether to accept the

1984, however, the membership was re-imagined as a community of donors. Much work among the Board of Directors went into choosing from among six possible logos in advance of the 1984 membership drive – clearly an effort to make that drive more lucrative by appealing to a donor base that valued a polished, professional image.

By the mid-1990s, what was once a member drive had become an individual donor drive, making the shift from member to donor complete. Reflective of this shift, in 1995 tickets to the organization's annual gala fundraiser were \$175 for an individual ticket and a stunning \$400 for a pre-event cocktail reception and preferred seating at the dinner!¹⁷⁵ Clearly the imagined community of the organization had shifted considerably, a shift that was invited in many ways by the organization's response to ongoing fiscal distress.

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s Gay Horizons operated on a shoestring budget. In 1984, revenues totaled just under \$24,000, and of that, only \$7,019 was spent

funding illustrate the difficulty the Board of Directors had in even communicating the sequence of events regarding the Hugh Hefner grant to the membership – and moreover, simply even keeping the membership informed about who was on the board. The notes from that meeting state “Maintaining good communication channels within the organization was a major concern of committee members. . . . Other items discussed were: the use of a suggestion box; posting of minutes on the switchboard bulletin board; posting and or distributing names of current board members to all volunteers; calling attention to Board meetings times and encouraging volunteers to attend; improving orientation of volunteers and board members to acquaint them more thoroughly with the organization. The counseling supervision groups appear to be a good means of funneling information to volunteers, and the executive committee agreed that this function can be emphasized even more.” Special meeting of the Executive Committee, April 20, 1980. Joe Loundy Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

¹⁷⁵ Letter to Human First Event Table Captains, 1995. Joe Loundy Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago. The following year's prices are even more stunning; in 1996, the high end ticket cost \$500 and included a pre-event cocktail reception and preferred seating as well as one thousand American Airlines frequent flier miles!

on staff – for one part time Executive Director position.¹⁷⁶ Ten years later the budget had increased to nearly \$1.2 million, with an Executive Director salary of \$42,000, as well as numerous other staff positions that managed specific programs. Alongside this exponential budget increase, however, remained constant financial stress.¹⁷⁷ In 1992, for instance, there was a \$92,000 budget shortfall from the previous year, primarily due to “significant shortfalls in development.”¹⁷⁸ At that time they had a loan from the Non-Profit Assistance Foundation for \$25,000, and the treasurer “reported that he believes the agency will have sufficient cash to operate through March.”¹⁷⁹ They received a letter from the United Way “which indicated that based on the Agency’s audited fiscal year 1991 financial position and results of operations, the Agency failed to achieve three of four financial ratio tests used by United Way to monitor the relative financial health of not for profit organizations.”¹⁸⁰ By 1996 the financial distress became acute enough that staff positions were laid off. In the minutes of the January 1997 Board meeting, the treasurer reported:

On January 26 Sandra and Holly met with staff about the financial status of the agency; the staff was informed that Joel Trenton would be laid off, salaries are frozen with no mid-year salary adjustments given, and Holly authorized two ‘floating’ holidays per employee. Holly asked that more

¹⁷⁶ Annual Budget, 1984. Joe Loundy Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago. The position description for the first Executive Director position reflects strong clinical/mental health focus, requiring a masters in social service or related field plus three years of “proven experience with, and sensitivity and commitment to, both the philosophy of social services and the needs of gay and lesbian individuals and their community.”

¹⁷⁷ Annual Budget, 1994. Joe Loundy Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

¹⁷⁸ Finance Committee Meeting, March 11, 1992. Joe Loundy Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

meetings with donors be set up soon and that board members participate in cultivating donors.¹⁸¹

At the March Board meeting of that year, Holly, the Executive Director, asked that Board members adopt a line item of office supplies and either donate the money to cover it or provide the supplies themselves.¹⁸² Given these fiscal demands, and absent a countervailing political pressure from inside the organization, it is no wonder that the organization turned towards cultivating increasingly wealthy donors and soliciting corporate sponsors.

It is alongside this organizational shift that Gay Horizons' longstanding desire to become a community center was imagined, planned for, and realized. The capital campaign began in 1997, and at that time they expected to break ground for a new center in 1999. In the appeal letter that was sent out that year, the Executive Director, Holly, wrote:

This facility will be a concrete symbol of the contributions we – The Gay and Lesbian Community – are making to Chicago. Our community will work together to define the structure and services for this Gay and Lesbian Community Center. Through education, outreach, counseling, and advocacy, we promote community cultural awareness, wellness, and empower community members to better understand themselves and the places in which they live and work.¹⁸³

Of course the community that would imagine this new community center was the one that had been fostered over the past ten years, a community intentionally cultivated to ensure access to wealth. The community center that Gay Horizons

¹⁸¹ Board of Directors Meeting Minutes, January 27, 1997. Joe Loundy Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

¹⁸² Board of Director Meeting Minutes, March 1997. Joe Loundy Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

¹⁸³ "A Special Message From Holly Offman," January 27, 1997. Joe Loundy Papers, Gerber/Hart Library, Chicago.

eventually became, the Center on Halsted, which broke ground in 2005 and opened in 2007, reflects this orientation towards the market. It is this Center, and its efforts to grapple with the community that it spent twenty years cultivating, with which the rest of the chapter is concerned.

“Gangbangers,” Troublemakers, and Other Others

A Chicago Free Press article from March of 2008 details, in an interview with the Executive Director of the Center, the struggle the Center has to define their constituents – the LGBT community. The article details a series of procedural changes that the Center enacted in order to “respond to trouble makers who’ve threatened the safe space that the [community center] had tried to create for GLBT youth.”¹⁸⁴

The Executive Director goes on to explain that the Center is “trying to create membership programs that help us identify the youths we’re trying to help [because] we’re getting a lot of complaints of kids on the street. ... In our community we’re already dealing with problems related to racism, and now we’ve got gangbangers on the corner.” Lest the “real” LGBT youth feel alienated by such efforts, he clarifies that it is important that “the GLBT youths who are part of the Center’s programs know they’re still welcome at the center.”¹⁸⁵ The article reads:

It’s also important, Valle said, that they feel safe there and respect others who are using the building and live in the neighborhood. ‘You can be here if you are respectful to one another,’ Valle said. ‘Those kids are welcome here. But there are those kids who are just trying to ruin it for everyone else, and right now they’re just exploiting our kids.’ Aldermen Helen Shiller (46th) and Tom Tunney (44th) are involved in helping to address the

¹⁸⁴ Gary Barlow, “The Chicago LGBT Center Deals With New Youth-Related Issues,” *Chicago Free Press*, (Wednesday, March 5, 2008).

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*

issue, he said. ... Ultimately, he said, the Center's goal is to provide a better environment, not a more restrictive one, for GLBT youths."¹⁸⁶

The Executive Director of the community center positioned these changes as necessary in order to respond to “troublemakers” and “gangbangers.” He further explained that “gangbangers and others seeking to exploit the GLBT youths who come to the [community center] have led officials to be more stringent in identifying youths who ... we’re trying to help.”¹⁸⁷

To contextualize this article, and understand the materiality of the project of defining and policing the LGBT community it describes, it is important to note that the Center moved into its brand new building in the gentrified “Boystown” neighborhood less than a year before this article was written, a move not just from a smaller building and focus on social services to a more expansive “community center” model, but also to the mobilization of a particular notion of “community” – a community that I argue is actively produced through techniques of normalization and surveillance.

It is important to note here that Chicago is both one of the most highly segregated cities in the US, as well as one in which poverty is most clearly racialized. Due in part to the collapse of the welfare system in the 1990s and the lack of compensatory social services, and exacerbated by the demolition of 18,000 units of public housing, which displaced more than 42,000 public housing residents, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless estimates that approximately 33,000 young people experienced homelessness

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

in Chicago in the year that the Center moved to its new space.¹⁸⁸ The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force estimates that approximately 40% of homeless young people are LGBT.¹⁸⁹ The Boystown neighborhood – although it is predominantly white – is, as a “gay” neighborhood, one area in which homeless LGBT youth of color, especially those that are gender non-conforming, make community and support themselves. Due to neoliberal law and order policies and the war on drugs/poverty/crime, the economic crimes homeless youth must commit in order to survive – squatting, loitering, shoplifting, sex work, turnstile jumping, etc. – are heavily policed as so-called “quality of life” crimes. Coupled with the unwritten police mandate to police gender itself, trans and gender non-conforming homeless youth of color in Boystown are heavily targeted by police profiling, subject to widespread police violence, and incarcerated at disproportionate rates. Therefore, when the Center on Halsted moved into this neighborhood, it entered into contested territory, finding itself already embroiled in powerful conflicts that highlight profound fissures and dislocations in the idea of LGBT “community.”

In analyzing this instance I make three related claims: the first is that the continued fetishization of “community,” which privileges narrow, (homo)normative formulations of identity, underwrites larger discourses of neoliberalism, ultimately serving to authorize and participate in the regulation and policing of those queered by capitalism and other systems of power: gangbangers, troublemakers, and other Others.

¹⁸⁸ Chicago Coalition for the Homeless and Survey Research Laboratory at the University of Chicago. “How Many People are Homeless in Chicago? An FY 2006 Analysis.” Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, (2006).

¹⁸⁹ Nicholas Ray, *LGBT Youth: An Epidemic of Homelessness*. (New York: National Gay and Lesbian Task Force and the National Coalition for the Homeless, 2006). 117

The second, related claim is that this production and policing of queer community increasingly occurs through the apparatus of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex. My final claim here is that the non-profit production, regulation and materialization of queer community serves as a hinge between affect, the “promise project” of homonormativity, and the biopolitical management of queer living and dying.

Within this framework, we can then explore this non-profit struggle to produce procedurally something called “the LGBT community” as the bureaucratized, regulatory non-profit apparatus acting as the connective tissue between affect and the biopolitical management of life and death. In the above article, the specter of the “gangbanger,” mobilized by the Center’s ED, is a discursive category through which both aspects of biopolitical power flow – the power to make live *and* let die. The most apparent biopolitical function of the “gangbanger” is to give pretext to the technologies of surveillance that target, monitor, and give over to state discipline young queer people of color. Jasbir Puar argues that homonormativity, the “queer incorporation into the domains of consumer markets and social recognition,”¹⁹⁰ has allowed particular queer bodies to become folded into the biopolitical optimization of life. Puar writes, however, that

The cultivation of these homosexual subjects folded into life, enabled through ‘market virility’ and ‘regenerative reproductivity,’ is racially demarcated and paralleled by the rise in the targeting of queerly raced bodies for dying.¹⁹¹

The “gangbanger” is a discursive construction through which normalizing power also flows. The “gangbanger” is related to the “terrorist,” the “criminal,” and other racialized

¹⁹⁰ Puar, xii.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*

categories which evoke not just threat, but a particular gendered and sexualized threat. In this context, the gangbanger produces not just those who are outside “the community,” troublemakers who must be policed, but also “the community” itself, those who are threatened: in this case a white(ned), (homo)normative subject. This subject has the resources and desire to participate in the center’s programs, the menu of state and foundation-funded programs, working to produce and perfect the normalized capitalist subject: self-supporting, employed, having particular kinds of sex in particular kinds of arrangements (meaning “safe,” monogamous, unpaid), and on a track towards, if not true social and political empowerment, at least limited and seemingly voluntary mobility within unquestioned constraints of continued racism, classism, and heterosexism.

These young people who are part of the desired and deserving “community” of the community center must “feel safe there,” but also “respect others who are using the building and live in the neighborhood.” This seemingly benign entreaty masks a much more complex dynamic of power. Located as it is in a nearly all white neighborhood, in a brand new “green” (read: fancy and expensive) building which rents space to a Whole Foods frequented by the residents of this gentrified neighborhood (increasingly young straight professionals with small children), demanding that the queer youth who access the Center feel “safe” is a complex prerequisite for community membership. Clearly, gender-non-conforming homeless youth of color who experience violence and racism on the street and within the social service spaces they must engage with (shelters, public aid, food pantries, drop-in programs such as the Broadway Youth Center, etc), and are heavily profiled and targeted by the police, are unlikely to feel “safe” in such a space. One imagines that they are less likely to “respect” the shoppers at Whole Foods who treat

gender non-conforming youth of color like aliens dropped from Mars, or the white gay “community members” who report that the Black young people are too “loud” and “intimidating.” These subjects – the *actual* young people who occupy Boystown due to the particular political economy of racism, poverty, and queerness in Chicago – are *not* the “queer community” produced through this normalizing discourse. This discourse calls forth a particular “GLBT” community – a phantom – a mechanism for normalization, through which this surplus population is managed.

In an interview with Chicago activist Laila Harim, who is involved in Gender Liberation, an organization that is critical of the Center – but also utilizes the Center’s space for meetings – I asked her about her observations of the effects of these policies. She reflected on her own experiences of simply *being* in the center, sitting in the tables Whole Foods provides for shoppers to eat their hot bar food in the lobby of the Center. She reflected:

The minute youth entered they feel surveilled, so I’ve seen this a lot. So I sat there in the lobby and it’s so overtly racist. So there was this group sitting at a table and sometimes it would get a little louder and immediately they were shushed. It’s like they are constantly being trained.¹⁹²

She went on to describe how youth in the public spaces of the center were policed – shushed, asked to leave – by security guards and Center staff, in response to feelings of “intimidation” by white adult patrons. She reported hearing that the staff of the youth space were directed to call the local precinct any time a young person on a list of individuals with warrants, provided by the police, accessed the youth space. In addition, following instances of “rowdy” behavior and youth “intimidating” clients on their way to

¹⁹² Laila Harim, Interview with author, March 2012.

therapy, security guards were hired to police the center. These security guards, in addition to policing what are clearly highly racialized complaints, routinely wake up and exit homeless youth who are sleeping on the very expensive furniture of the center in violation of a “no sleeping” policy. Harim described how the Center’s gendered bathrooms are patrolled by staff of the center, and that on numerous occasions the staff of the Whole Foods below has called the police because of young people stealing food and customer complaints about people in the “wrong” bathroom. Further, she described the various policies used by the Center to make homeless youth less able to access the space, including “no sleeping” rules. In particular youth were coming to Gender Liberation complaining that they were asked to leave the Center, or removed from the Youth Program for some specified period of time, through an opaque decision making process and with no recourse. She said:

It has a very top down structure, [with] a ton of different programs with constantly changing people, and it is constantly devising new programs. There is a huge amount of turnover. ... This is why we [Gender Liberation] got involved in Restorative Justice stuff, because people can be reported and there is no process and people have no recourse. And there is always a new person they have to deal with, and they don’t have up to date resources.¹⁹³

Here the surveillance and policing is coupled with the same institutional instability found in the organization’s early history – high turnover, little stability of programs, opaque or absent systems and policies, and lack of transparency or clarity about decision making.

Taking Back Community

The call for ‘safe streets’ has been a rallying cry expressed by both social minorities and property owners in the eras of postwar urban decline and

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

*neoliberal development in the United States. ... The increased attention paid to security has revealed disparate understandings of the threat held among those considered representative of and those marginal to the national body politic.*¹⁹⁴

- Christina Hanhardt

In the years following the changes instituted at the Center to weed out “troublemakers,” and position themselves as weeding out “troublemakers,” the furor surrounding supposed youth crime, loitering, and violence only intensified, particularly each summer. The Center increasingly became figured as the locus of this intensifying uproar. In the summer of 2011, two separate instances of violence brought these issues to a head. The first, in June, involved a young white gay man mugged at knife-point and suffering minor stab wounds to the chest. The second involved a fight among a group of young queer people of color that resulted in stab wounds to the back and chest of a young African American individual. That incident, which took place outside a gay bar directly across the street from the Center, was recorded by a nearby homeowner from his condo balcony.¹⁹⁵ That video went “viral,” both on a local and, to some degree, national scale. In the weeks that followed, coverage of these events in the local press, on social media sites like Facebook and YouTube, and at a series of community meetings held by Alderman Tim Tunney and the 23rd Precinct Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) revealed the degree to which this was really a conflict over the relationship between the neighborhood and the “community,” who constituted “the community,” who was a threat to it and why, and the role of “community” organizations like the Center in causing, facilitating, and managing such issues.

¹⁹⁴ Chrisitna Hanhardt, “Butterflies, Whistles, and Fists: Gay Safe Streets Patrols and the New Gay Ghetto, 1976-1981.” *Radical History Review*, Issue 100 (Winter 2008).

¹⁹⁵ According to the filmmaker of the YouTube video.

The video of the second incident was posted on YouTube with this description: “*This is exactly the types of violence that we have been bringing to light and complaining about.* The victim received multiple stab wounds to the chest and back, but is currently in stable/good condition. Hopefully this event will bring some increased awareness to the residents and patrons of the neighborhood who are concerned for everyone's safety.”¹⁹⁶

This description suggests a vindicated homeowner, someone who had been “complaining” about these “types of violence” fruitlessly, but now hopes to be taken seriously. That individual was also part of a group of Boystown residents and business owners that came together that summer, calling themselves “Take Back Boystown.”

Take Back Boystown is principally a Facebook presence, although it organized events like “positive loitering” and various community meetings. Their presence was primarily felt in terms of how they organized and framed the conversation. For instance, one of their first posts after opening their Facebook account included a blurry photo of a group of young people of color, some apparently gender non-conforming, with a CPD officer facing away from the camera in the foreground. The caption reads “A mob of Boystown residents?? I don't think so... and an injured officer as the result of it?”¹⁹⁷ The first commenter agrees, writing “Definitely not Boystown residents.”¹⁹⁸ They framed the “problem” as one of young people from the South and West Side coming up to “their” neighborhood. In Chicago this means African American youth, both in terms of the actual segregation of space and because of discourses about “the Southside” and “West Side.”

¹⁹⁶ “Boystown/Halsted Street Stabbing,”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Q6j3VF8eGs. Original emphasis.

¹⁹⁷ Take Back Boystown Facebook page, <http://www.Facebook.com/TakeBackBoystown>, (June 28, 2011).

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*

The site administrators adopted a hands-off approach to the comments they received, which ranged from barely coded racist stereotypes to explicit racial slurs. In the comments following the video of the incident posted on Take Back Boystown's Facebook page, one commenter suggested that "let's focus on the real problem: the violent criminals themselves. ... The problem is with the type of people that are coming into the neighborhood!"¹⁹⁹ Fundamentally, according to this logic, the "problem" is that "outsiders" are coming to Boystown. Not just any "outsider," either, but a certain "type of person" who is a violent criminal. Another comment makes the racial coding even clearer:

Part of the problem is people are so PC. Look its fairly obvious walking down Halsted street at night who belongs and who doesn't. In this case the thugs are black. I would not care if they are black, white, latino or otherwise. If they are trouble they don't belong here. Yes your right I'm hostile and pissed. BTW crime dropped 53 percent in NYC when the Guardian Angels patrolled, so that argument does not work. What do u suggest we do? Stay inside? Build them a rec center? Move away? Pray for them? Fuck that I'm fighting for me for my friends and for my neighborhood.²⁰⁰

Posts frequently refer to "ghetto thugs" or "homey g's" and a number refer to such "criminals" as "fucking animals" and "savages." Despite this racial coding and frequent use of racist slurs, the site and frequent posters adopt a certain colorblind victimization when they are called out by other posters for racism. The site administrator writes:

This page has come under allot of scrutiny lately. A lot of criticism is given because we refuse to accept crime and violence to be an integral part of embracing diversity. To our critics please understand by believing these kids can be in the neighborhood and NOT rob, fight or destroy public property, I think we are showing a less judgmental attitude than those of you who say we are racist because we don't believe they have to live that

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*

way. Shame on you. No one is on this page for fun. Trust me, we would all love to be able to NOT have to talk about a war being played out on our streets.²⁰¹

Despite the overt racism of the response, those who named that racism were framed as “judgmental” “PC-ers” who are in denial about the “war being played out on our streets.”²⁰²

In much of the commentary the actual events recede and it is re-narrated as an anti-gay hate crime. One commenter asked, “this man, was attacked because of being gay?” The next commenter replied: “White stabbed and beaten, by a mob of black racist youths. Police call it a fight and not a hate crime.”²⁰³ Perhaps conflating this incident with the previous, in which the victim was white, this commenter fed a narrative framing these young people as not only not *really* of the community, but motivated by homophobia as well. Christina Hanhardt describes the prevalence of this narrative framing in gay responses to violence in which “in the activist imagination, homophobia and a (racialized) culture of poverty were understood to share the same origins.”²⁰⁴

In the comments section on the Take Back Boystown page as well as on coverage of the event in other news sources, the connection being made between this “wave” of “youth crime” and the Center is abundantly clear. One commenter writes: “Start complaining to the Center on Halsted about ALL of the ghetto thugs, who are “playing” at being gay, that the Center INVITES to the neighborhood.”²⁰⁵ Notice the similar

²⁰¹ *Ibid*

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ “Videotaped Street Attack Divides Chicago’s Boystown,” July 7, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNtMYjT8kzc>

²⁰⁴ Hanhardt, p. 73.

²⁰⁵ “Gang Intimidation at Boystown Businesses” *Chicago News Report*, (June 20, 2011) 25

rhetoric of this commenter to that of the Center’s very own Executive Director discussed in the previous section. In both figurations these “thugs” and “gangbangers” could never be a *real* part of the LGBT community, even if they have same-sex sexual practices – they could only ever “play” gay. Another commenter writes simply: “Close the Center on Halsted.”²⁰⁶ The Center on Halsted, more so than the Broadway Youth Center, was blamed throughout social media and press coverage of the event, in part because of the Center’s physical space and superior branding. In an interview with one Center staff member, she described the narrative put forth by Take Back Boystown: “basically any violence that happens within Boystown is blamed on the Center if it happens by young Black people. ... To the point where people want to close the center.”²⁰⁷

After the initial framing had been set on social media and in the comments section on gay press coverage, the story began to receive wider attention. The following excerpt from a *Chicago Tribune* article offers a clear picture of the dominant narrative produced about these events:

Jim Ludwig, who owns Roscoe’s Tavern, a local gay bar, is the president of Triangle Neighbors and a board member of the Northalsted Business Alliance. Some gay patrons have also complained about the youth. ... “It’s not a race thing, it’s a cultural adaption thing,” Ludwig told me. “It’s a youth rebellion thing. We’re at a loss trying to figure out what’s a good thing for these kids to be doing other than congregating on the corner. Sometimes there are 50 kids. But it’s only a handful that doesn’t have the social skills regarding sidewalk etiquette, so it intimidates customers and residents.”

What complicates this further, he said, is that the neighborhood does have to fend off a criminal element, including sex traffickers and those dealing drugs.

²⁰⁶ “Man Stabbed in Lakeview, 1 Suspect Caught by Bar’s Security,” *Chicago News Report*, (June 18, 2011).

²⁰⁷ Michyl Hoffstead, Interview with Author, June 2011.

“There’s a whole bunch of kids who aren’t causing trouble,” Ludwig said. “But they are an unknowing shield for others who do come here to commit crimes. Some residents can’t or don’t distinguish between the two groups.”

For its part, the Center is trying to be a good neighbor. While programming used to end at 9pm, it now ends at 7pm. Youth are instructed daily not to loiter and to be on their best behavior. The center also has hired additional security guards between the peak loitering hours of 4 and 8 p.m., to protect neighbors from disturbances, but also to protect the youth.²⁰⁸

In this framing, the white bar owner is presented as perfectly reasonable, and the inability of white Boystown residents and “rightful” visitors (who, while they may be from the suburbs, are “really” gay and so therefore rightfully in Boystown) to distinguish between “criminals” and the culturally mal-adapted but otherwise non-criminal youth is, apparently, appropriate. In this discourse, the responses of the Center to crack down on all youth who attend their programs and receive service through limiting those services, increasing surveillance, and paternalistic policing, is being “neighborly.” These responses on the part of the Center, as well as the dominant explanatory narrative for the violence, clearly identified the real “community” and those who pose a threat to it.

In the context of this discursive framing, the 23rd Precinct held a CAPS meeting that upwards of 1000 people attended.²⁰⁹ By this point young people, especially young queer and trans people of color, were being targeted wholesale by local homeowners and business owners. The Northalsted Business Alliance had even hired private security to patrol the streets. In a video of the July 7 meeting posted on YouTube, one white man

²⁰⁸ Dawn Turner Trice, “Some Black Youth Feel More At Home in Boystown, But Get Chilly Reception,” *Chicago Tribune*, (November 30, 2009).

²⁰⁹ CAPS stands for Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy, a “community policing” strategy intended to mobilize community members to surveil their neighborhoods and act as allies to the police.

stands up and shouts, “we spent 30 million dollars to build the LGBT Community Center. Of. My. Money!!”²¹⁰ This man articulates the perspective held by many white Boystown residents and Center donors: that their identity and donations *should* rightfully allow them a say in Center services, policies, and programs, and that their proprietary affect towards the Center is and should be reciprocated. In other words, they claim the Center as *theirs* and the Center should claim them and only them in return. As we have seen over and over in this dissertation, the affect of donors is nearly always reciprocated. Organizations who rely on community members for donations must always be who that donor imagines they are since it is that imaginary organization they fund.

But young person after young person stood up and named the larger issues at work. One such person, who from the film appears to be a gender non-conforming African American young person, says: “there’s a reason why the youth is lashing out at everybody, there’s a reason why the youth is looking down to everybody in here, because y’all look down to us!”²¹¹ At that point her words are obscured by boos and “come on’s” and grumbling. When she can be heard again she goes on to say “as somebody who was homeless when I came up here, where was I supposed to go but to Belmont, but to walk the streets on Belmont?”²¹² According to this and many other young people and adult allies, the real issues – the issues that preceded, and, in many respects, caused the violence - are the violences of racism, homelessness, poverty, gentrification, homophobia, and segregation. According to this narrative, the very “culture of poverty”

²¹⁰ “Videotaped Street Attack Divides Chicago’s Boystown,” (July 7, 2011)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNtMYjT8kzc>

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.* Belmont is the location of the El (elevated train) stop that serves boystown and houses numerous gay bars and businesses, and is, additionally, a key area for young people to congregate, hang out, and trade sex.

discourses that framed the conversation – and the “tough on crime” neoliberal policies that followed – were to blame. The collapse of the social safety net that exacerbated poverty among people of color and the concomitant expansion of police powers, especially the focus on economic and “quality of life” crime, both of which intensified housing instability and homelessness, were named by these young people as root causes.

Despite this analysis by the very young people participating in the Center’s programs, the response of the Center was decidedly in line with that of their white donors. In an interview with one of the reporters from the local gay press covering the conflict, she characterized the Center’s response as “walking the line.” She went on to say, “they tried to stay out of it, they invited people to tour the center, started a task force on crime, and tried not to engage.”²¹³ Creating a task force on crime certainly sounds like engaging the narrative, however. In fact, the other changes she reports contradict this supposed stance of non-engagement. She described how “the security guards are carrying guns now. They’re off-duty police guards. [The Center] switched security firms in April or May of last year, [because] they said they wanted to bring in more LGBT or ally guards, but they have guns now.”²¹⁴ Furthermore, the Center has “really cracked down on the no sleeping rule, [and] they won’t let people charge their phones there. If you steal from Whole Foods you are banned from the Center. Also, I’ve heard that the youth program gets lists of people with warrants from the 23rd precinct and calls them when a youth with a warrant comes in.”²¹⁵ Despite the analysis advanced by youth members, the response of the Center endorsed, however tacitly, is the racist narrative of Take Back Boystown.

²¹³ Mack Colter, Interview with Author, March 2012.

²¹⁴ *Ibid*

²¹⁵ *Ibid*

Perhaps more importantly, it actively contributed to the policing of youth of color, providing a very clear reminder about the biopolitical scope of community. Those that are figured as other to community, as threats, are directly exposed to violence, to surveillance, and to incarceration.

Of course, given its funding model, the Center could hardly do otherwise. To do so would have been to jeopardize the meager program offerings directed at young people, as well as the rest of its programs. Such is the power wielded by donors – donors that the Center intentionally cultivated to constitute its community.

Producing the “Sex-Trafficked Victim” and Its Others

The Center actually has its own in-house anti-violence organization, which in the context of this outcry about youth violence, could have been expected to get involved. Although a program of the Center on Halsted, the Center’s LGBT Anti-Violence Program (AVP) is also affiliated with a larger national coalition of anti-violence programs, some of which are housed in community centers and some of which are independent. I asked the coordinator of that program what its response had been, and she mused, “it’s been very reactionary. Let’s put out safety tips, blah blah, because most of that violence doesn’t fit our [grant] scopes.” Instead, the funding of the AVP demanded focus on another project.

At first glance it seems an odd alignment. The Center’s LGBT Anti-Violence Program accepted an anti-human trafficking grant from the Illinois State’s Attorney’s office to work alongside the Salvation Army’s PROMISE program – the Partnership to Rescue our Minors from Sexual Exploitation. In announcing the new program, the

Community Center reflected that “The Cook County State's Attorney, in offering this partnership, became the first law-enforcement agency in the nation to specifically address sexual trafficking of LGBT minors.”²¹⁶

I would like to explore this seemingly odd alignment in a couple of ways. First, I'm interested in the frames of knowledge mobilized by this collaboration and the work it does in producing the gay “child victim,” as well as Others who cannot be made worthy of life through that figure. Second, I would like to explore the ways that this collaboration is, in fact, not so odd; instead I will analyze it as an extension of already existing collaborations between gay non-profits and the state. Throughout, I am interested in the affective and political economies of this discourse - the ways that such alignments are invited by the structure of the non-profit itself, reworking the charity's historic disciplinary technologies for determining life-worthiness, now deployed through the neoliberal register of “community.” I contend that through interventions which mobilize such figures as the gay “child victim” and the juvenile prostitute, gay non-profits serve as key apparatuses for directing some bodies towards life and life-worthiness and other bodies towards policing, incarceration, and shortened life.

Through this anti-human trafficking grant, with funds provided by the Department of Justice through the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, the Center is contracted to “expand services to victims of sexual exploitation,” and works with the Salvation Army to expand its PROMISE training to be inclusive of LGBT victims of sex trafficking.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Press Release, Center on Halsted, “Illinois Department of Justice and Cook County State's Attorney Enable Center on Halsted to Expand Anti-Violence Efforts,” (January 6, 2011).

²¹⁷ Press Release, Cook County State's Attorney's Office, “Federal Grant Helps Expand Cook County State's Attorney's Fight Against Human Trafficking,” (August 26, 2010)131

This grant is part of the Illinois Safe Children Act, which was spearheaded by the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office, and is intended to “enhance protections for juveniles caught in the sex trade and provide new legal tools to police and prosecutors to target those who prostitute children.”²¹⁸ This law is similar to the Safe Harbor Act passed in New York State in 2008 – both are envisioned to provide protection to minors by discursively transforming them from criminal “juvenile prostitutes,” as the criminal code used to refer to them, into “child victims.” A key provision of the law “provides for the transfer of jurisdiction over children who are arrested for prostitution from the criminal system to the child protection system, with special provisions to facilitate their placement in temporary protective custody if necessary.”²¹⁹ Furthermore, it seeks to provide additional support systems for these newly-created child victims in order to facilitate more successful prosecution of “pimps.” The Community Center’s collaboration with the State’s Attorney’s office and the Salvation Army reflects a new trend in how criminal-legal and social service systems approach juveniles arrested for prostitution. Whereas before, minors involved in the sex trade faced jail time and criminal records, the law now seeks to provide counseling, child welfare and even protective custody. We would be deceived, however, if we believe that the purpose of the law is to increase the options available to young people and thereby increase their access to safety.

Many activists argue that, like the Safe Harbor Act, both laws actually endanger queer and trans youth involved in the sex trade in a number of ways. First, both laws often mandate that youth be put into the child welfare system, a space of violence for

²¹⁸ Press Release, Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office, “Alvarez Applauds Governor’s Signature of Illinois Safe Children’s Act,” (August 20, 2010).

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

many – and often a system that has already failed them in the past and is frequently a key reason they are trading sex in the first place. Similarly, youth are often court-mandated into homophobic, racist and transphobic social services. The law relies on social services which often do not exist, and when they do, as a recent study of youth involved in the sex trade points out, such services are often perpetrators of violence against queer youth rather than “saviors” from it.²²⁰

A Chicago affiliate of Incite! Women of Color Against Violence recently released a statement critiquing this new wave of sex-trafficking legislation and funding, and the overwhelmingly positive narratives that have been produced about it – even, and especially, from within progressive or feminist circles. In response to an article in the magazine *Colorlines* which positioned such laws as much needed “simple solutions” to the issue of sex-trafficking, they argue instead that

The Safe Harbor Act, along with initiatives like it that ... are [being] promoted across the country, are NOT simple or solutions for most of us. First, they don't stop arrests of young people for prostitution-related offenses, or the police abuses of young people in the sex trades, including police trading sex in exchange for promises of dropping charges. They also don't stop arrests of young people in the sex trades that involve “charging up,” i.e. charging young people with weapons or drug-related offenses which may be easier to prove. Second, while they may stop criminal prosecutions of young people for prostitution-related offenses, these laws do not eliminate detention and punishment of young people involved in the sex trades, they just shift young people from the jurisdiction of the criminal courts to family court systems, where they can remain entangled until the age of 21. And, in the end, only a very narrow group of people can benefit from these laws.²²¹

²²⁰ Young Women's Empowerment Project, “Girls Do What They Have To Do To Survive: Illuminating Methods Used By Girls in the Sex Trades to Fight Back and Heal,” (2009).

²²¹ Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, “No Simple Solutions: State Violence and the Sex Trades,” (April 22, 2011).

The authors of the piece go on to note the ways that LGBT youth are made invisible under the frames of knowledge produced by this kind of legislation, despite the active participation of programs like the Center on Halsted. They document the disproportionate numbers of LGBT youth experiencing homelessness, and the degree to which supportive services actually exacerbate youth homelessness, leading to a greater number of LGBT youth on the streets rather than in homeless shelters and foster care. Given the intensified policing of economic crimes under neoliberal “tough on crime” policies, LGBT youth of color are overrepresented in the criminal legal system, and therefore very rarely meet the criterion that differentiate the juvenile prostitutes from the child victims – such as no prior criminal or family court cases, no additional charges like weapons or drugs.

Given the critiques leveled against the legislation, even from within other LGBT Anti-Violence Programs, I was interested in why the Chicago AVP would choose to accept such funding. In an interview with the Director of the Anti-Violence Program, Michyl Hoffstead, I sought to clarify what the expressed goals of the program are:

MB: What has the actual process been like? A young person gets connected to you...?

MH: It's been 100% stupidly frustrating. The reality is that most of what the young people need is housing, and, 'oh it's unavailable!' You're a young male or queer person and you're not finding one of the 118 beds available. It's very very long term and that's what's so frustrating. The long term stuff is the task, it's the work ... And the law stuff is only for people under 18, so that doesn't mean bupkis for the majority of people ... who are over 18. So again the people who want to support or say 'you're being exploited,' the systems stuff overlaps with the law until you're 18 and then after you're 18 you should know better.²²²

²²² Michyl Hoffstead, Interview with Author, August, 2011.

In a surprisingly candid assessment, Hoffstead acknowledges that the program, which is intended to provide supportive services to those involved in the sex trade, presumably to support their exit from the sex trades, is unable to actually provide any of the services that would offer a young person more or better options. It cannot intervene in a youth shelter system that is severely underfunded to begin with and inaccessible to most trans and gender-non-conforming people. It cannot offer any other viable economic opportunities or solve the crisis of youth unemployment. Hoffstead notes that, because the legislation focuses only on “child” victims, the State’s Attorney’s Office seems to imply that the restricted choices of young people involved in the sex trades are unacceptable until they are 18, but after 18, as Hoffstead says, “they should know better.”

What is interesting here is the seeming knowledge, by the person paid to implement the program, that it doesn’t work – either for the legal system or for the non-profit. In fact, when I asked Michyl why a young person would engage with this program, Hoffstead replied, “The only upside is for young people who are currently involved in court cases or want traditional counseling, which sucks for most young people.”²²³ If we are to imagine that the purpose of the law is to make young people involved in the sex trade safer and have more options, it is unsuccessful. From the perspective of the State’s Attorney’s Office, the purpose of supportive services is to enable people to “come forward” without fearing prosecution, and avail themselves of the criminal legal system as victims rather than criminals. However the law neither makes the majority of young people safe from prosecution themselves due to their participation in other criminalized behavior, nor does it actually fund any supportive services. If the

²²³ *Ibid.*

purpose for the Community Center is to offer services to those young people that would enable them to be safer and have more options, it is similarly unsuccessful. But that does not at all mean that the program doesn't "work" in other ways; the remainder of this section explores the ways the program does work – or, rather, the work that the program does.

A primary way this program *does* work is in the production of the child victim as a discursive and material category through the technical apparatus designed to "support" them. A National Institutes for Justice study found that only 8% of people trading sex in New York City had been forced into prostitution by a "pimp." Despite this, laws claiming to help youth who trade sex rely on a narrative of a trafficked child victim. They do more than just *rely* on that narrative, however – they produce the subject of the narrative, materializing the "trafficked child victim" through the interventions the laws prescribe.

Hoffstead went on to say:

I don't know how many of these folks would want to trade sex if they were housed and had all of the resources they need. I don't know what they would do if they had all their needs met. [But they] want to prosecute johns, or want to prosecute pimps. So there's a big role in saying what people *think* sex trading or trafficking *is*. . . . All these people who think of a little girl being kidnapped and tied to a bed in someone's basement – that's not what it is for queer youth.²²⁴

Here Hoffstead is acknowledging the ways that this law is producing categories of knowledge – sex trafficking, and the child victim. Although Hoffstead does not say this, I would add that the law also reproduces another trope, that of the "juvenile prostitute" who is excluded from the narratives of childhood innocence and victimization and thus also excluded from any kind of protection the law might claim as its purpose. This public

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

narrative of sex trafficking is fundamentally not describing a young queer or trans person of color who is making choices to survive – no, the little girl is passive, innocent, and acted upon, she is not an actor. It is this passivity that enables her to be brought out of the category juvenile prostitute and redeemed as a child victim. This discursive – and material – transformation is not available to everyone.

Hoffstead describes one mechanism for the production of this discursive category: the second imperative of the funding, establishing “numbers.” She described how “It’s not all getting folks in for prosecution. They [the State’s Attorneys Office] would probably like it, ... but its not all prosecution based. ... The other piece is numbers, they want to be able to show that this [problem] exists and people should support [it].”²²⁵ However, Hoffstead expressed frustration at this catch-22: no one accesses the program, because the program can’t provide the kinds of services – housing, economic support, employment, systems advocacy – that would make a real impact on the availability of choices for young people. However, since no one accesses these non-existent services, the program can’t gather the numbers to prove that the services are needed. However, the State’s Attorney’s office and other funders involved in anti-trafficking work remain focused on the importance of data and proof.

Despite this, when I asked Hoffstead why the grant was worth taking in the first place, she replied in what felt like a pat way: “The Center recognizes the impact of youth who are trading sex. So establishing the numbers is worth it. Funders always want you to say the numbers, this problem exists.”²²⁶ In that moment I experienced her shift from a shared recognition of the failures of the system with which she – and I – are engaged, and

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

into the voice of the program she is paid to represent and must, therefore, to some degree invest in. What's important about this shift in register is it turns our attention away from the individual complicities, choices, and ambivalences, and towards the broader – and historically established – relationships of power that structure the non-profit system. The funders will always get their numbers – these narratives will be produced and reproduced – that is the power that funders have over non-profits. They demand a certain kind of narrative – the sex-trafficked child victim – in order to provide funding. Non-profits must produce that narrative, whether or not it has any actual referents in their work, if they would like to have their program funded. For the Community Center, despite the fact that the child victim narrative actively contributes to the criminalization and erasure of queer and trans young people of color trading sex, it is, nonetheless, what George Henderson calls a “socially necessary representation,” useful for raising money.²²⁷ He describes these representations as “identities with good cash value, ... surrogates for the representations of identity they often silence, because they are less ‘useful.’”²²⁸ The Center can literally capitalize on the gay child victim narrative, selling a narrative to their funders, while simultaneously erasing, and enacting violence upon, queer and trans youth of color trading sex – the real “targets” of the program.

Here I argue that gay non-profits create, through collaboration with and investment in this discourse, the worthy and deserving – the gay child victim – who is worthy and deserving *because* of the violences inflicted on him. In making these kinds of violences visible, reparable, discreet, and isolated from systems like poverty, the

²²⁷ George Henderson, “‘Free’ Food, the Local Production of Worth, and the Circuit of Decommodification: a value theory of surplus,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Volume 22, (20014).

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

homelessness industry, the child welfare and juvenile justice system, they create the Other of the child victim: the juvenile prostitute who is fundamentally criminal, abject, outside the boundaries of community – fundamentally not deserving of life. This is by no means a new phenomenon. In fact, producing racialized and gendered narratives of life worthiness, and distributing resources accordingly, is a primary historical function of voluntary organizations in the US. This example demonstrates the ways that existing surveillance and disciplinary technologies are deployed in new and expanded ways under the rubric of “community,” through such “positive,” life-affirming programming around safer sex, HIV prevention, resume writing, and other so-called “life skills.” As Jasbir Puar has pointed out, however, this turn towards life relies on its Other, who must remain cathected to death.

Here the bio- and necro- political valences of this collaboration become clear. The child victim narrative is a discursive and material category through which life-worthiness is allocated. Although the narrative doesn’t “fit” for actual queer and trans youth trading sex, it “works” nonetheless by discursively rescuing the white gay child victim from criminality. Through this redemption, the gay “community” of the Community Center is recoded; “we are not pedophiles, we are the victims of them, and the police will protect us.” And importantly, to be worthy of life, you have to want to be rescued, to “desire the state’s desire” as Judith Butler has so aptly said. *But of course if you’ve actually done anything to ensure your own survival – to rescue yourself – you are no longer worthy of survival.* The state produces subjects that are victims of something that – if they were to choose it – would make them criminals. And in doing so it casts those who choose to

trade sex as irreparably criminal, and importantly, outside constructions of queer community.

In analyzing the work this narrative is doing, for whom it is working, and on whom it is working, I'd like to turn briefly to the work of Sara Ahmed and Jin Haritaworn. The process of creating a child victim can be usefully thought of according to Ahmed's description of "sticking" signs to bodies. In particular, Ahmed looks at how "different 'figures' get stuck together, and how sticking is dependent on past histories of association that often 'work' through concealment."²²⁹ The child victim narrative, despite the fact that it doesn't quite "fit," can be stuck to some queer bodies through existing frameworks and narratives. The framework that is most clearly at work here is the existing hate crimes narrative that has a long history within gay anti-violence work. As I have argued, this seemingly odd collaboration between the state and a gay anti-violence project is, upon closer inspection, not odd at all; it is simply the most recent in a long series of seemingly strange alliances.

There is already a victim narrative – the gay victim of hate violence – that can be grafted on the child victim narrative. And in addition to a ready-made narrative there is an already existing infrastructure, expertise, interventions – regimes of knowledge. And in both narratives the police become the savior, a liberal force for inclusion, protecting the emergent gay citizen and ushering him into the care and community of the nation.

In their work on the emergence of hate crimes discourse in Berlin and the way that it is used to produce and criminalize the "homophobic migrant Muslim," Jin

²²⁹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), p.13140

Haritaworn describes the gay turn toward the criminal legal system. Haritaworn is worth quoting at some length here, as the parallels are quite informative:

The move of LGBT activism into the penal state enables the police to reinvent themselves as protector, patron, and sponsor of minorities, at the very moment that their targeting of racialized populations and areas is reaching new levels. The criminal/sexual justice discourse thus diversifies a process that is really about homogenization: the policing of inner cities, the displacement of poor and nonwhite people from neighborhoods targeted for ‘revitalization’ and the abandonment, forced assimilation, incarceration, and expulsion of those who no longer symbolize diversity, but rather a threat to a society that is colorful and diverse enough without people of color.²³⁰

The white gay child can be rescued from criminality, but the Other, the juvenile prostitute, is a danger, and must be policed. We see this in the policing of the neighborhood at large, the targeting of queer and trans youth of color as “pimps” and “gangbangers” – those who could never be understood as child victims. In the previous section, that “other” was explicitly identified in the *Chicago Tribune* coverage of the Boystown stabbing as a “criminal element” coming to Boystown to traffic sex. And the Center, figured as the locus of this supposed youth violence, explicitly turns to the police and prison system in response. Recall the press release with which I began the section and the way that the Community Center praised the State’s Attorney’s Office for being the first in the nation to “address the sex trafficking of LGBT minors.” The criminal legal system is figured as a progressive response that can enable safety and usher these nascent citizens into full belonging.

Christina Hanhardt describes this as the outcome of decades of queer antiviolence organizing in collaboration with the state, in which organizers discursively separate the

²³⁰ Jin Haritaworn, “Queer Injuries: The Cultural Politics of “Hate Crimes” in Germany,” *Social Justice* 37(1): 69-91.

“gay victim” from the “other” urban deviants and criminals through a strategy of space claiming and community policing. These two strategies dovetail perfectly with neoliberal strategies of law and order policing and gentrification. As white gay people create “gay space” and come to identify with property, they embrace the racialized targeting of “quality of life crimes” under a framework of “anti-violence.” Economic crimes become an assault on gay neighborhoods and the more diffuse gay “community,” thus ushering in more policing and more “community solutions.”

This particular intervention is but one in a long process through which the police and criminal legal system increase their reach into Black and brown spaces under the framework of increasing safety for gay people. In addition to intensifying and consolidating the technologies through which the state can access queer and trans people of color, it further solidifies the role of the Community Center in gathering up those bodies through the affective project and technical apparatus of “community.”

My interview with Michyl Hoffstead ended on a somewhat resigned note; she lamented that although the program doesn’t allow them to do anything that “would change anything for people, we have to have these numbers to show that something needs to be different in order to fund [projects that could get at the root causes]. But you can’t show the numbers because it’s framed for only under 18.” And, Hoffstead finished, “the reality is it’s a two year grant. It’s hard to dream big if it’s only ever a two-year thing that supports half a person.” Despite all the apparent reasons to the contrary, however, the Center believes that this funding was worth accepting – funding is almost always worth accepting for a non-profit. Invisible in these calculations, however, is the cost borne by LGBTQ youth of color who are further imperiled when the regimes of knowledge

surrounding the “child victim” go uncontested by an important institution that claims to work on their behalf. The collaboration with the state, while it may be understood as inconvenient or burdensome, is figured as ultimately redemptive, or at least a necessary step on the road to safety, inclusion, and community. Meanwhile the gay non-profit provides the technical apparatus through which the Other of the child victim, the juvenile prostitute, as well as the pimp, thug, and gangbanger, are subjected to the necropolitical power of the prison.

Conclusion

*Just as discipline must engage in a perpetual process of interpellation (the ‘self’ is not made once, then plunked down into a body), the technologies of biopolitics must constantly calculate and recalculate what counts as a population and how it is counted in order to remain a vital means of biopolitical management. ... The population does not precede the technologies that count it: biopolitics manage the population by organizing the biological species as a plane of intervention.*²³¹

- Craig Willse

In her book *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, Jasbir Puar notes that for all of their engagement with Foucault, few queer studies scholars have taken up that part of *The History of Sexuality* that addresses biopower, the regulatory power addressed to populations which buttresses disciplinary power over the body. Interesting in light of queer theory’s reticence in addressing this mechanism of power, Foucault theorizes that it is with the emergence of biopower, which he describes as the power “to *foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death,”²³² that racism becomes inscribed

²³¹ Craig Willse, “‘Universal Data Elements,’ or the Biopolitical Life of Homeless Populations,” in *Surveillance and Society* 5(3), (2008), p. 245.

²³² Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, p. 138.

in the mechanisms of the state. Puar comments that while queer theorists have concerned themselves with the repressive hypothesis, postcolonial and critical race theorists have taken up biopolitics: the racialized management of life and death – the “distribution of risk, possibility, mortality, life chances, health, environment, quality of living – the differential investment of and in the imperative to live.”²³³ By, as Puar invites, “centering race and sexuality simultaneously in the [analysis of the] reproduction of living and dying,” the biopolitical function of gay non-profit articulations of community comes into focus.

Using a biopolitical lens, we can see something else at work. Despite the supposed retraction of the state as prophesied by many neoliberalism scholars, what we see here is, instead, an *expansion* of state power, albeit organized in new ways. Craig Willse, in his work on the homeless sheltering industry, contends that the decentralized, nodal, dispersed, and often contradictory non-profit/state/corporate apparatus is actually much more powerful than a centralized state, allowing for adaptive surveillance technologies, disciplinary mechanisms that expand and contract, and the multiplication of subjects and subjects of knowledge. He writes, “surveillance technologies in this context do not ‘clamp down,’ but rather let loose. They let loose a biopolitical register toward the proliferation of governance and its populations, which is to say, they free new objects of intervention that may not look like one individual, but of which the individual, in order to survive, must become a part.”²³⁴

Based on these moments of conflict, and according to these theoretical frames, I draw a series of conclusions. First and most simply, community is biopolitical.

²³³ Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*, p. 32.

²³⁴ Willse, p. 248.

Community is an expansive discursive technology that crafts and enfolds an imagined “real” gay person/LGBT people while simultaneously constructing threatening others, exposing those threats to early death, and rationalizing that exposure in terms of the safety and freedom of the “community.” That enunciation of community relies on and facilitates neoliberalism in a number of interrelated ways. The services provided by the Center to its rightful constituents are understood as appropriately dispersed through a private non-profit rather than through the state, in part because of the race and class conceptions of who constitutes “the community” and who relies on the state. These culture of poverty and tough on crime notions – narratives that don’t always fully accord with one another, but, nonetheless, live alongside each other – contribute to a sense of racialized threat. Further, the organization, in responding to the threat posed to “the community” by these threatening others endorses and demands increased policing and expanded police powers, while the limited social services offered by the Center, services which in many ways replaced a centralized social welfare system, are blamed for the presence of threatening others.

Further, the structure of the non-profit itself invites and enables this way of knowing community, and constructs the technical apparatus that requires, facilitates, and manages it. The funding structure of non-profits invites a logic of community that is white and propertied, since its community is traditionally comprised of those who can fund it. In this articulation of community, as in that of the organization I analyze in the next chapter, *space* is a particularly important analytic. Ultimately we see that claiming space through the white(ned), homonormative, corporatized, non-profit apparatus using

rhetorics of safety and threat is always both a productive as well as policing gesture, a bio-necro collaboration.

Finally, this biopolitical enunciation of community fortifies state power, in particular through its policing apparatus, which is refigured as a progressive force protecting “the community” from threatening others. And in turn, the state can enter into that reciprocal affective relationship with the community (center), where the Center and the City become, for each other, funders, endorsers, allies, mascots. Despite this, however, young people continue to *choose* the Center, to claim it, despite being only vaguely and marginally claimed in return. Further, in interrupting the narrative produced about them in this enunciation of community, those young people achieved a solidarity and politics about racism and gentrification that will arm and equip them for their own survival. And, somehow, despite their seeming accordance with the racist narrative of threat, the Center does continue to provide the services and spaces that were so attacked. Did they “walk the line” between maintaining donor investment and their own ideas of service, as one interviewee suggested? Or is the faith and commitment of youth and staff another instance of the kind of cruel optimism that Lauren Berlant describes, in which their very belief contributes to the fist of the neoliberal state expanded through this biopolitical conception of community?

Chapter Three: Capital, Homonormativity, Non-Profitization: At the Limits of “By and For”

In the fall of 2010, I received an email solicitation that began: “It’s been said that the act of coming out is a political act. I disagree. Hardly a week goes by when a sports figure, actor, musician or another celebrity comes out with little fanfare. The political act has become a more personal act. What was once ‘I am gay – deal with it’ in 1988, has now become ‘*I am gay, and I am no different than you.*’”²³⁵ These words, written by the Executive Director of a Minneapolis-based LGBT youth non-profit, District 202, mark a fascinating change – a change within the organization itself as well as a broader change in queer social movement politics. This statement illustrates the shift towards what Lisa Duggan calls “homonormativity,” the politics of domesticity and recognition that now dominates contemporary queer politics, in which accessing the mainstream through formal equality and hollow tolerance has come to replace justice as the goal of the movement.²³⁶ This small Midwestern queer youth non-profit offers a fascinating window onto this shift.

Founded in 1990, District 202 provided a drop-in space, as well as various kinds of youth leadership development programming, street outreach to homeless youth, HIV prevention programming, and extremely popular Drag shows and other social events organized by youth. District 202 was envisioned as a “non-profit youth community center committed to providing social, cultural, and educational opportunities by and for

²³⁵ “It’s never too late to come out ... again,” Email sent to author from Executive Director of District 202 informing the community of upcoming events. Dated Monday, Oct 11, 2010.

²³⁶ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*, (New York: Beacon, 2003).

lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender youth and their friends.”²³⁷ Early organization materials always led with the Audre Lorde quote, “Without community there is no liberation.” By the mid-1990s, District 202 was an incredibly vibrant organization, making “in excess of 10,000 contacts [with youth] a year”²³⁸ and regarded as a national model among what was then a relatively small number of organizations specifically working with LGBT youth. Taking a stand that would prove difficult to maintain and always somewhat contentious, District 202 was unique in that it did not provide social services, instead focusing on youth leadership development.

Despite its incredible popularity among queer youth in the mid-90s and early 2000s, District 202 was also plagued by financial instability and protracted struggles over the political mission of the organization. In 2009, the Board of Directors fired the youth staff and then the Executive Director, closed its physical space, shut down for six months, and re-emerged as a “social entrepreneurship” organization for LGBT youth with a marketing professional as the new Executive Director. Facing a great deal of community critique, and without the skills to manage a struggling non-profit, in 2011 District 202 finally gave up its non-profit status and became a program of a large social service agency.

This shift is startling; to somehow go from being a youth space invested in liberation and community struggle to asserting that coming out is no longer political in the space of twenty years is remarkable. But this shift is not isolated – it is, in fact, a useful illustration of widespread shifts in queer social movement organizing towards

²³⁷ District 202 pamphlet, undated, Tretter Collection, University of Minnesota.

²³⁸ “Looking Back” in *District 202 News*, Winter 2008. Tretter Collection, University of Minnesota.

homonormativity. This chapter uses the experience of this organization to investigate the relationship between the homonormative turn in queer social movements and the marketization of queer non-profits, processes themselves located within the rising dominance of neoliberalism in both political economy and cultural politics. Located at this juncture, I ask a set of interrelated questions: How did the non-profit structure itself dovetail with – or even facilitate – the rise to dominance of homonormative politics? How have neoliberal modes of financialization and marketization impacted LGBT organizations? More broadly, what can the example of District 202 tell us about the current state of queer social movements, the complicated role of non-profits and private foundations in those movements, and the resistance practices of queer youth of color, transgender and gender non-conforming youth, and their allies?

In what follows, I analyze struggles over power and meaning at District 202 in order to highlight the material and discursive role of *capital* in homonormative articulations of queer politics. I begin by briefly exploring the theoretical and methodological implications of grappling with an organization in which the loss of the site mirrors a broader set of absences and silences. I then trace key snapshots from its twenty-year history that reveal the unexpected antecedents for this seemingly surprising shift. How did an organization that once called forth a vision of liberation articulated by Audre Lorde become a “social entrepreneurship organization” that seeks “mainstreaming” through “corporate partnerships?”²³⁹ My intent is to show *both* that District 202 didn’t become this organization overnight – that the non-profit structure

²³⁹ James Sanna, “District 202 Names New Executive Director,” *The Column*, (October 26, 2009).

itself contributed to its current form – but also that its transformation was contingent, that it was never inevitable, and in doing so, locate it as a site of ongoing struggle.

Tracing Traces and Countermemory: Methodological Approaches to Sitelessness

*Following ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories, stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which a memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the future.*²⁴⁰

- Avery Gordon

*A sociology of the trace thinks about erasures of violences, bodies used by powerful interests, emptied lands filled with spectacle, and memory receptacles that bide time with promised futures as partial answers that prompt yet more questions.*²⁴¹

- Herman Gray and Macarena Gomez-Barris

In grappling with how to ethnographically represent the voices of resistance that have been shut out of both the now-defunct space *and* the official history of District 202, I find theoretical and methodological traction in Avery Gordon's book, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, as well as Herman Gray and Macarena Gomez-Barris' recent edited collection, *Towards a Sociology of the Trace*. Gray and Gomez-Barris build on Gordon's work about haunting as a methodological approach to social violences rendered invisible in history, similarly taking up absences - things, processes, people, violences, *traces* not recoverable or made visible through traditional

²⁴⁰ Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 22.

²⁴¹ Herman Gray and Macarena Gomez-Barris. *Toward a Sociology of the Trace*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 5.

methodological approaches. I am interested in the tools that these scholars provide for thinking about how what at first appear only as methodological challenges might actually have critical theoretical registers, offering important opportunities to “trace a trace” of social violences. In other words, what does the now-empty space and the absence of the youth who once occupied it mean for an ethnographic project? What kind of methodological creativity is demanded by that absence?

The absence of the physical space of District 202, and the bodies that once occupied it, are both an object of this chapter as well as a key methodological difficulty. This project is not served, therefore, by traditional site-based ethnography, as the lack of the site is a key problem under analysis. In the context of the disappearance and privatization of the physical documentation of District 202, as well as the challenge – and profound loss – the closure of the physical space presents, I utilize interview as a key strategy to grapple with the challenge of privatization, a tactic that opens up a window onto the contingency and complexity of the “official history” that District 202 legally owns and mobilizes for its own fundraising purposes. I have conducted one-on-one interviews with individuals who engaged with District 202 from a range of different perspectives: staff, youth, board members, outside “consultants,” and community members. Each offer important perspectives that at turns contextualize, interrupt, contradict, or echo the “official” story District 202 tells – and sells – about itself.

This project seeks to analyze the structural and discursive changes enacted by District 202 within the context of neoliberalism, recognizing the important role privatization is playing in shifting power on multiple levels, as well as in obscuring the social violences enacted by those shifts. Therefore, alongside interviews, I remain

attentive to *absence*. I focus specifically on the former physical space of District 202 and the question that its loss poses for theorizing. In this context, the space is that “which appears to be not there [but] is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities.”²⁴² In conducting interviews, our conversations were often haunted by the space itself. I found myself deeply compelled by the space both because I once worked in a space very similar to District 202 and am invested in the radical potential of queer homeless youth organizing, as well as because of the stories that pour forth from young people, youth workers, former staff, and community members when I ask them about what District 202 and the loss of its physical space means to them. Though I never experienced District 202 as a young person – the space holds no personal memories or transformative experiences for me – I nonetheless recognized myself, my aspirations for queer politics, in the stories and memories about the space that I encountered almost immediately upon moving here. There is an enormous amount of investment, of emotion tied up in this loss despite the seemingly successful privatization of both the organization and its story. This loss is a social violence, connected to a series of social violences experienced by particular queer(ed) communities, that haunt the public narrative – the official memory – of District 202. The fact that the closure of the space so disproportionately impacts queer youth who already have so little access to space – whether because they are homeless, or because they are gender non-conforming and many spaces are dangerous or unwelcoming, or because so many LGBT spaces are dominated by white people with wealth and the voices of queer youth of color are not heard or valued – this itself is a social violence. And these kinds of social violences are

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

not separable from the closure of District 202, nor from the terrible irony that the organization was founded based on an awareness of this inequality and then something, somehow, happened to make the organization disavow the existence of this lived reality, and shift its orientation towards capital.

Ultimately I approach District 202 – the struggle over its physical space, its mission, and the memory produced about it – as a site of simultaneity and intersectionality, attempting to analyze together the seemingly disparate discourses and structures that both facilitate, and are facilitated by, its privatizing, homonormative, and marketizing moves.

The Optimism of “By and For,” the Cruelty of Capital

Key to understanding the struggle over space, mission, and youth power at District 202 is an analysis of the conflict between the organization’s structural orientation towards capital – an orientation in many ways demanded by the non-profit form – and a political mission that invited youth empowerment, which often disrupted or challenged that orientation. This conflict has, in fact, been central to the foundational and ongoing struggles over what “kind” of queer youth District 202 imagined to constitute the “youth community” and what their “empowerment” would mean and look like. Although the organization has always represented itself as “by and for” LGBT youth, and one that was committed to “liberation” through youth power, in practice expressions of such power were often met with resistance from staff and board members, and limited in paternalistic or outright punitive ways. By and for youth is quite a radical vision in the context of youth serving non-profits that retain the “save the children” approach of charity in the

US. It is an explicit challenge to the compassion narrative I explore in the first chapter. Instead, this District 202 was asserting that youth could be more than victims, more than objects in need of discipline.

The first Executive Director, Paul, described what the “by and for” was intended to mean when the organization was created. He said: “it meant that youth are gonna name the agency, youth are gonna help define what it looks like, so they were on hiring committees, so youth are gonna define hours of operations and programs.” But, he noted, “what became difficult is that as you become bigger, there is the business end and defining the culture, and they aren’t the same body.”²⁴³ From his descriptions of that early process, the power dynamics *embedded* in the non-profit form were ignored. Paul’s recollections about these early days reveals core assumptions about non-profits themselves: that they are essentially “good” and of “the community.” That they are the kind of place where power falls away and shared identity is paramount.

But it’s worth dwelling for a moment on this “business end” that Paul mentions. He is referring to more than payroll and insurance; included in the “business” of non-profits is the entire development and fundraising apparatus. The non-profit sector is funded by charitable contributions from individuals, from private foundations, from corporations, and directly from the state. Of those sources, individual contributions are by far the most significant. For instance, in 2013, the largest source of charitable giving in the US came from individuals at \$241.32 billion, or 72% of total giving.²⁴⁴ This is followed by foundations, at \$50.28 billion, bequests at \$26.81 billion, and corporations at

²⁴³ Paul, Interview with Author January, 2011.

²⁴⁴ National Philanthropic Trust, Charitable Giving Statistics.

<http://www.nptrust.org/philanthropic-resources/charitable-giving-statistics/>

\$16.76 billion. And, in fact, individual giving has increased every year since 1973, with the exception of 2008-2009, due to the impact of the financial collapse. The increase in private giving is due in part to the focus on narratives of charity and volunteerism popularized by the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton administrations as alternatives to the welfare state.

It is over the period that this dissertation considers that the “business end” of the non-profit developed and professionalized significantly into the highly complex technical apparatus that it is now. For instance, the Association of Fundraising Professionals, which began in 1960 with only 197 members, cites the 1980s as a period of “impressive growth and an increasing sense of professionalism” the sector.²⁴⁵ Further, in the 1990s, they write, “fundraising and the nonprofit profession became a critical part of the economy.”²⁴⁶ During this period, fundraising became a professional and decidedly technical endeavor.

There are multitudes of trainings available to teach one how to “target” an appeal letter, even how many bullet points or phrases in bold are necessary to keep a prospective donor’s attention! Non-profits create a development plan with a year-long calendar of activities intended to raise money: events, strategic communication, and individual donor cultivation, as well as grant-writing to foundations.

An organization like District 202 may have had only some of these capabilities, especially during its early years, but they existed within a discursive and material landscape that was oriented towards capital: “success” looked like more donors, more

²⁴⁵ Association of Fundraising Professionals, “AFP: The First 50 Years.”
<http://www.afpnet.org/>

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

major donors, and a more robust system for cultivating and managing them. This is also due in part to the fact that donors expect this kind of system, to be “cultivated” in a certain way, as a mark of professionalism and respect. Donors also expect a particular narrative from an organization like District 202, an appeal that produces in them a particular affective response that cues them to give. Overwhelmingly that narrative is about compassion or community, and often both. Donors either want to “help” the children, or experience themselves as part of a gay community by supporting a resource they wish they had when they were young. Teresa, a grant-writer for District, described how one of the main constituencies was “gay men, sometimes lesbians, who became donors, who definitely had a sense of identification with District around healing their own experiences of being young and gay.”²⁴⁷ District 202 had to then speak to and craft the particular narrative of identity, community, and compassion that would appeal to donors, a narrative that was often at odds with the “by and for” mission of youth political power.

District 202 might have thought of itself as a new and unique kind of non-profit building on the energy of an emergent social movement – but in its “not-profitness” it was always already tied to the uplift narrative of “proper” citizenship that is structured into the non-profit. As I have argued, for social movement actors, activists who invest an enormous amount of emotional and political belief and energy in these organizations, non-profits are ideal examples of what Lauren Berlant calls “cruel optimism”: that which you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. This cruel orientation is a function of the circuits of capital on which non-profits rely, and the power of the moral economies

²⁴⁷ Teresa, Interview with Author, July 2012.

of that relationship of dependence. The historical function of non-governmental organizations in the US – managing the “deviance” of poor people and immigrants, and “educating” them as to the ways of middle class citizenship, while serving as a more punitive and less redistributive alternative to a welfare state – this does not disappear simply because non-profits have been discursively recoded under neoliberal anti welfare-state narratives as spaces of community.

The primary reason this orientation has not, and cannot, simply disappear is that it was always more than simply a set of feelings about poverty; it was, and is, a structural relationship between those with wealth and those without it – a relationship built on policing, surveillance, and control, a relationship facilitated by non-profits through their use of, and reliance on, private funding. That reliance demands that organizations appeal to major donors, private foundations, and corporations, all of which have a vested interest in maintaining the present system to which they owe their wealth. Foundations are, as I’ve said, fundamentally tax shelters for families and corporations. These foundations can choose to support whichever cause is most “deserving,” maintaining a centuries-old relationship of dependence in which those with wealth determine how best to use their money to remake society in a way that benefits them and reflects back to them their merit and power, positioning poverty as a personal failing rather than a byproduct of the same system of capitalism that made them rich. Despite this cruel relation, actors on all sides of the non-profit nexus remain attached to the non-profit form as part of what Berlant calls “the good life” – that moral/intimate/economic fantasy that keeps people invested in institutions, political systems, and markets even when evidence of their fragility, ineffectiveness, or outright failure is apparent.

To be clear, I am not arguing that this structure of power within non-profits is inevitable. On the contrary, District 202 is a clear example of the ways that the power of the wealthy Board members, foundations and corporate donors are *not* absolute, and are mediated and interrupted by the very people they see as their objects of intervention. Instead, what District 202 reveals is that the problem lies in letting this relationship of power go unmarked, understanding it as ordinary, which is very different than *necessary*.

The Limits of “By and For”

In an interview with Yana, a former youth who became a board member, I asked, “what were the limits of ‘by and for youth’ in those early days?” She said that basically there were none. Or perhaps more accurately, no one knew what they were. As she put it: “It was an experiment.”²⁴⁸ Many interviewees pointed to one incident in particular as the first challenge to the “by and for” commitment. Interviewees described “the poem,” with an assumption that I knew the events to which they were referring – indicating that this incident had become core to the unofficial memory of District 202, a memory much more fraught and contested than the sanitized history found in holiday appeal letters. This excerpt from my field notes details an interview with Jax Alder, District 202’s Program Director from 2001-2004, in which we discussed how the story is circulated:

We spoke for a moment about “the poem:” She described how a young person, Joan, witnessing the turn towards corporate money and adult power, wrote a poem calling out adultism and the hypocrisy of the “by and for youth” mission. After the poem was put on the wall, the Executive Director at the time took some major donors through the space who “freaked out.” The ED removed the poem in response, and there was a great deal of outcry among the “youth community.” Jax added that the youth made a proposal at their community meeting to put the poem back

²⁴⁸ Yana, Interview with Author, November, 2010.

up. The staff agreed, apparently – but instead of being put back up where it was, it was painted on the wall *outside* the space, in the stairwell on the way up. Jax described how the ED could usher major donors right past it on the way up to the space. So it sounds like a bit of a draw – youth made a proposal and got to put the poem back up, but adult staff limited their power and limited the impact of their intervention by pushing the poem outside the space.²⁴⁹

There are numerous aspects to this story that reveal both the contingency of the “by and for” youth model, and the memory of it. At first glance it seems like a fairly straightforward incident in which a young person called out the dynamics of power at work in the space, hitting a little too close to home for adults in power to handle, and her intervention was, in turn, censored. The sensibilities of major donors, and their expectation that youth be grateful and appropriately “empowered” but not politicized, *did* prevail.

Yet this moment also reveals a great deal about how “by and for” youth was imagined to begin with, for whom, and its limits. Not only did a young person feel enough ownership over the space and investment in its purported mission to protest what she experienced as hypocrisy, but the adult staff acknowledged the legitimacy of the critique in their willingness to compromise – they too believed in some version of youth power. What this reveals is not that “by and for” youth was a lie – or a marketing ploy, as it is now – but instead the underlying and often faulty frameworks about youth at work at District 202: their expected gratefulness, what their empowerment would mean and look like, and the idea that their power and leadership would never interfere with the unspoken and largely invisible structure of the non-profit itself – the Board and their power, its

²⁴⁹ Jax Alder, Interview with Author, November, 2010.

fiscal management, fundraising, budgeting priorities, and, perhaps most importantly, its understanding of itself in relation to its object, youth.

In another interview, Yana offered important context about District 202's early years and the assumptions on which its "by and for youth" mission were based:

At this point she brought up the infamous poem that caused such a firestorm. She described the situation thusly: "I think Joan would say this about herself, she was a kind of embittered youth, who came up in youth services, who used services provided to young people. She had been a part of Safe Harbors' empowerment program. She wrote a poem that critiqued youthworkers who think they are saving youth. So youth were painting walls and she decided to paint the poem on one wall. Paul [the Executive Director] felt personally attacked, like it was an assault on youth staff. So he ordered it covered up. ... He was dismayed that a young person would jeopardize our standing with funders. That's where the question of what District 202 was first came into question. That's where the first challenge of what by and for meant came up."²⁵⁰

Yana makes clear that for the staff there was an underlying assumption that the role of the funders and their sensibilities were not discordant with a "by and for youth" mission.

Paul's "dismay" suggests that at least for him, part of "appropriate" youth empowerment meant developing allegiance to existing structures of capital and funding. Yana was also very clear in laying out what she felt were the underlying political questions at stake in debates over how the "by and for youth" mission should be implemented.

"Those three words were debated again and again. Whole board meetings were devoted to it!" I asked what the terms of the conflict were. She explained that it was the "Classic savior, or I would say custodial, model. Like, 'while youth were here doing their fun youth things at least there were still adults here who understood how the world really works.' And 'we like youth, but there need to be adults who understand what the world is like.' So the crux of the conflict was around savior/custodial versus a radical vision of youth liberation."²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ Yana, Interview with Author, November, 2010.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Interestingly, alongside this conflict over “the poem,” Yana revealed, were two important shifts: an intensification of an ongoing tension over the presence and role of youth on the Board of Directors and a move to a new, larger space. Yana characterized the early board as fairly naïve to the power traditionally held by Boards of Directors of non-profits. Comprised largely of youthworkers with political investments in youth liberation, “the board was practically irrelevant. The board had no idea. I don’t think the youth really even knew they were there.” Yana continued, saying, “either they didn’t know [the power they had] or it was a decision not to wield it.”²⁵² At this early stage, Yana emphasized, when the board was made up primarily of people who had *worked* in non-profits, rather than gay and lesbian individuals with wealth, the board did not occupy the role of limiting youth power to nearly the same degree as they would later come to.

As I will discuss below, however, the Board underwent a profound transformation during the capital campaign to move to the new space; as fiscal demands became more central, individuals with deeper pockets and wealthier friends replaced the youthworkers on the Board. This Board, in the wake of the “poem incident,” became more resistant to youth representation on the Board. Yana and others eventually prevailed, although the youth members were not accorded voting rights, as the Board didn’t feel youth could take fiscal responsibility for the organization, and were worried about unspecified “liability issues.” Although often described in interviews as a completely separate question, the role of the Board and the invisibility of their power is key to understanding District 202’s ongoing struggle over the meaning and limits of “by and for youth” - and the larger impact of the non-profit structure on queer politics.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

“Corporate Networks of Gays and Money:” The Capital Campaign

“At some point their concern with the bottom line became more important than the young people and their day-to-day lives. That’s what’s shameful – you can see the connections. How do we explain that to the youth?”²⁵³

- Yana

In 1997, after six years of operation, District 202 moved from a small storefront space into a new home, renting a renovated loft space in a trendy neighborhood on the edge of downtown Minneapolis. Despite the hype evident in the District 202 archives, and the important attachment that many people – youth and staff – have for that space, this move emerged in interviews as a critical period of organizational transformation, a transformation that not only haunts but facilitated the new “space-less” District 202.

Yana described the build-up to the move:

District 202 “was growing, had hired more adult staff. ... Then the idea of expansion was raised, because of the numbers coming through the door and that there was more adult staff. Three to four adult staff sharing one office was untenable. With growth came more non-profit structure. To me this is one of those turning points. When we moved to the new space there was a huge capital campaign, a lot of money invested, and the board had been changing - less youthworkers, more corporate – people who had ties to corporate networks of gays and money. Paul [the first ED] worked that really well as a cute gay white man can do. He was able to elevate and get District 202 to a place financially of stability and ... desirability. People *wanted* to fund District 202! There was a volunteer backlog! When they did their first mailing – you always lose money on those things, but they made money, which is practically unheard of when you’re buying a list. What I really loved about District 202 at that point, it must have been ... what was it ’98? ’97? Everybody loved District 202, [saying] ‘I want to put my money, I support this vision.’”²⁵⁴

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ Yana, Interview with Author, November 2010.

What Yana captures here is the *excitement*, the feeling of community and possibility that District 202 offered and on which it was literally able to capitalize. And given this general environment, the capital campaign happened, by all accounts, fairly swiftly for a non-profit, and District 202 moved into its newly renovated 7,000 square foot space in 1997. In interviews, the capital campaign and move to the new space emerged again and again as a pivotal moment of change. I want to highlight just a few aspects of this important transformation: the changing relationship to space itself and the ways that District 202's discursive representations of itself shifted as it shifted its orientation towards capital.

Yana shared that in the new space the power dynamics that had been less visible in the original space emerged in stark relief. She remembered:

So with the move to the new space there was a desire for respectability, a desire for structure - the coffee house had new strictures [as well as] new equipment. It wasn't the rundown storefront so people had to take care of the space differently. There was a new conference space, new ED office, a new Development Director office. Space became an issue for the first time. ... You had a doorway to offices [for the first time], you heard first grumblings about feeling like there were spaces where youth couldn't go.²⁵⁵

Implicit in Yana's description are the ways that unspoken, and presumably even unconscious, ideas about the way respectable non-profits are "supposed" to look were incorporated into the new space. Importantly, the poem was written on the walls of the *new* space, which is critical to understanding how it emerged as such a flashpoint. It made explicit the ways that the "by and for youth" mission stood in marked contrast to the slick, sanitized world of "corporate networks of gays and money" that had been called

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

upon to fund the new space. In counterpoint to the removal of the poem, Teresa, who later became a grant-writer but at that time volunteered at District 202 leading a writing group, recalled that in the new space, painted over the doorway between the youth space and the staff offices, were the names of the major donors who had “made the new space possible.”²⁵⁶ When donors would be given tours of the new space, she recalled, they would look for their name on that doorway. Moreover, when she began working in development, she remembers that the painted names over that doorway were “part of how I learned about who the ‘gay elite’ major donors were in town.”²⁵⁷ The space was literally remade in order to appeal to major donors, while the possibilities of youth power were diminished.

I want to briefly highlight one additional aspect of this moment of change: the ways that District 202’s infrastructure – particularly its Board of Directors – shifted as the organization shifted its orientation towards capital, and the impact those changes had on the possibility of youth power. Paul characterized this change, saying, “I think as you grow, and as you get formal structures of funding, your funders ask for more credentials and you look for experience and skill sets that aren’t common among youth.”²⁵⁸ Furthermore, as the Board became ultimately responsible for raising more and more money, they also became more attuned to the needs and desires of donors. The donors could pick up and leave in a way that the youth never would.

Despite this seemingly successful capital campaign, the organization’s financial stress only increased. In fact, underlying each instance of youth resistance was a

²⁵⁶ Teresa, Interview with Author, May, 2014.

²⁵⁷ Teresa, Interview with Author, July 2012.

²⁵⁸ Paul, Interview with Author, January 2010.

fundamentally unsustainable relationship to funds and fundraising. Jaime, who became the program director following Jax's departure, felt that after the move to the new space, District 202 never again regained its financial footing. In fact, ten years later, this fiscal instability was cited as the primary impetus for the organization to give up its non-profit status and merge with a large social service. The fiscal unsustainability experienced by District 202 ever since the capital campaign and move highlights the difficulty of reliance on the kind of affect-based "good feelings" funding that Yana described. Such capital campaigns rely on the excitement of people to support new and innovative programs; individuals are invited to live out their feeling of community, feel included and a part of something that matters. However, this is understood and experienced as a one-time gift - anything more than that begins to feel uncomfortably like dependence, which of course it is, given that the entire non-profit sector relies on the largess of those with wealth.

Such one-time gifts that are the hallmark of capital campaigns cover the initial cost of a building or move, but once the organization is housed in this larger, more expensive space, the financial needs intensify even though the grant-based income often does not. This invites a widely-observed cycle in which organizations chase grant funding to make up this budget gap, whether or not the grant-funded program directly relates to the core mission of the organization. Non-profit professionals call this phenomenon "mission drift." Although consultants make a living touting various solutions, its underlying cause is the untenable funding structure on which the non-profit sector at large relies. This sector-wide precarity tends to produce a crisis-like atmosphere that in some ways mirrors and intensifies the crisis experienced by the organization's participants.

Perpetual Assessment

“What was hard was that District 202 could never catch up with itself. It had the biggest budget it had ever had but was being asked to create new programs all the time.”²⁵⁹

- Jaime

In this context, the issue of “services” and the relationship of youth to programs at District 202 took on new dynamics. In our interview, Jax expressed strongly that it was in the move to the new location, and the capital campaign to raise money for that move, that the organization really started to shift to a concern with “at-risk” youth, and alongside that new framework, a shift towards “services.” He said that he felt that going after “corporate money” was part of why things shifted – those funders understood their role as intervening in the lives of “at-risk youth,” so District 202 played to that understanding. Yana expressed even more strongly that “services” or an “at-risk youth” framework were antithetical to District 202’s mission and practice. She described it as “totally unique in that way – it was explicit about not offering services.”²⁶⁰ The question at stake here is not services themselves, but instead the discursive world of services – the uneven client/provider power relationship that is paradigmatic of the services framework. In this formation, which District 202 increasingly – and, to some degree, always – participated in, youth were understood fundamentally as targets of intervention, and their “empowerment,” their capacities as “leaders,” were never intended to be turned back on the organization itself. The underlying pervasiveness of this discourse was made clear a few years later.

²⁵⁹ Jaime Alexander, Interview with Author, December, 2010.

²⁶⁰ Yana, Interview with Author, November 2010.

The emergent critique of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex has pointed to the fundamental paradox of these relationships of dependence.²⁶¹ In her description of organizations that exist in the “shadow of the shadow state,” Ruth Wilson Gilmore stresses the continued dependence on the state of even those non-profits that eschew government funding and the state.²⁶² Gilmore is describing agencies not formally involved in the provision of basic needs services, but instead engaging in “community organizing” or advocacy – even, and especially, progressive organizations working for social justice. So although Yana stresses the importance of District 202 explicitly *not* providing direct services, this approach is not enough to interrupt the power that the charity framework has in structuring, through funding and the reliance on funding, the material and discursive relationship between youth and the non-profit.

For District 202, and many other queer organizations in the mid-2000s, a widely available source of money, and the one to which District 202 turned following its capital campaign, was anti-tobacco funding. Vaguely related to its mission, and newly available from the state due to a combination of the multicultural moment, the major tobacco lawsuits, and recent studies that revealed the disproportionate impact of smoking within GLBT communities, tobacco money was always an uncomfortable fit for District 202. Usually squeezed into existing HIV prevention education and programming under the general title of “health,” anti-tobacco funding required odd moments in which youth who

²⁶¹ See *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, Eds. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007). Specifically, Dylan Rodriguez, “The Political Logic of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex.”

²⁶² Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “In the Shadow of the Shadow State,” *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, Eds. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007). p. 47.

were seeking referrals for youth shelters or to get tested for HIV were encouraged to quit smoking, despite the fact that they may have had no interest in doing so and were perhaps smoking as a strategy to cope with the issues for which they *were* seeking assistance. HIV prevention funding, which sometimes veered towards “social services,” at least had the upside of allowing, to some degree, youth leadership in the design and implementation of the programs and offered opportunities for youth employment. Anti-tobacco money was intended to solely to fund “interventions,” and therefore had no such flexibility. Jaime Alexander, who replaced Jax as the Program Director, describes this odd alignment:

At the same time the center had some huge federal ... not federal, state funds. Huge tobacco grants. Had quite a few contracts for such a small organization. I mean there was HIV-prevention positions from the beginning. What was really beautiful [about the HIV-prevention funding] was that we had young people learning how to provide services, we had peer outreach workers, so it was a back and forth.” She hesitated and then continued by saying “But...tobacco sucks always. At least it used to be prevention *and* cessation. The new grant that I was under which was like \$100,000 was for smoke free homes, cars, etc. So we had to do like policy stuff. And we were in conversation with the folks at the state who recognized that it was pretty ridiculous, but it funded a lot of youth positions.”²⁶³

Both because of the unprecedented number of contracts District 202 had with the state, and because of the tension this created for its “by and for youth” mission, District 202 embarked upon a period of assessment that seems to have continued almost uninterrupted to this day. However this assessment process seemed to exist on two, separate levels – the first grant-mandated and conducted primarily by staff, and the second among youth and staff about the mission and meaning of “by and for.” Jaime described her feeling that

²⁶³ Jaime Alexander, Interview with Author, December 2010.

“District 202 could never catch up with itself. It had the biggest budget it had ever had but was being asked to create new programs all the time. But we tried to rein that in a lot...”²⁶⁴ She explained that they tried to counteract this momentum using the strategic planning process, but that the two levels of assessment – the youth-based and the grant-mandated – could never be made to speak to each other. Of course, given that the structure of the non-profit relies on foundation funding, and foundations would not understand youth-led strategic planning as fulfilling the requirements of assessment, it is not surprising that one level of assessment was valued over the other in organizational planning. Jaime described this disconnect:

“Some of what was driving the documentation was that what I was hired under was a grant from Smith [the Smith Foundation] working with Leavitt [Leavitt Research Center] to revamp all of the center’s reporting and data collection and decision-making procedures.” She went on to say that alongside this top-down documentation there was ongoing work with youth to do similar infrastructure work, this focused on clarifying youth power, mission, relationships, etc. She said, “So there was that level and there was also youth community meeting process, rules, looking at the rules and deciding the format that the rules could change.”²⁶⁵

The pressure for strategic planning and assessment and the ongoing fiscal unsustainability seemed to come to a head when the Board learned that their new building was being sold. Jaime goes on to say, “And then at the same time we found out that the building had been sold and we were gonna have to move,” describing a new period in which staff and youth felt allied against a looming crisis:

The youth felt like staff were their allies, and because we were under threat of losing the space like we were all in this together. There was a huge search process, and that is one time that youth felt really disempowered.” She explained that the Board had recruited some realtors

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

to work pro bono and a youth search committee was formed that would go out and look at possible spaces along with some staff, the realtors, and Board members. “The pro bono realtors and the Board would just not show up and youth and adult staff had worked so hard to get there and they would just not call.” And then to add insult to injury, the Board discontinued the youth search committee process and blamed it on the youth. “When the Board dropped the search committee they claimed that the youth were so unpredictable and rude and it was embarrassing because they would ask bad questions. I remember Carter and I just being like ‘were we at the same showings?’”²⁶⁶

Oddly, despite the clearly identified fiscal unsustainability of the new space, District 202 remained in the building it could not afford and that was at risk of being sold out from underneath it until it closed in 2008. This financial insecurity was long-standing; in my interview with Jax – who, as a reminder, was the Program Director *before* Jaime – I asked if District 202 had ever been financially solvent. Jax replied that he didn’t think that since the organization moved in 1997 they had ever been financially secure. At least two years before he left, Jax saw the increasing panic about the “looming crisis,” and the necessity of leaving that space. They were paying \$3000/month in rent, he remembered, which was ultimately given as the reason for closing the space 10 years later.

This underlying fiscal unsustainability is tied to the perpetual assessment that fulfills the mandates of grants rather than actually addressing the crisis. The issue is not assessment as such – in fact, stepping back and addressing the sources of the fiscal instability and distance from its original mission in a holistic way could have been very powerful. However, because the assessment demands of grants are generally focused on the individual programs they cover rather than the health of the organization as a whole, and because the assessment work of youth was never taken seriously at the highest levels of the organization, the very structures that were the engine of this crisis remained

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

unmarked. Once again, it is the *invisibility* of the structures of the non-profit, rather than the structures in and of themselves, that was the problem.

On Community in Late Capitalism; Or, Off the Streets and Onto the Web

“It is unique and I can’t decide if its unhealthy or magical, but the magical part that looks at District 202 felt so strongly connected to an idea, and through an idea to each other. And the physical space had something to do with it as well. It gets into your blood. A room of one’s own. You’d see the lights on, young people would see the lights on. And from the lights people would come up and you could see something shed off of them. I don’t know, it’s just huge! I’ll probably never experience something like that again.”²⁶⁷

- Jaime

In 2007 the dynamics of the ongoing dialectical relationship between the grant-mandated assessment and youth- and staff-led strategic planning changed. The strategic planning process was championed by a new interim ED, who was able to package it in language appealing to the largely corporate Board. In an interview with one of the consultants hired to conduct the assessment, she described the way they intentionally proposed this assessment to the Board “from a change management perspective” that they felt would appeal to the business sensibilities of most and the progressive politics of a few.²⁶⁸ Among the staff and consultants this was a strategic review intended to address the failure of the organization to live up to its social justice “by and for youth” mission, for Board members it was intended to figure out how to reduce costs and address the fiscal crisis. The consultants hired to facilitate this process, both of whom are local progressive queer activists, engaged a wide array of key stakeholders, especially youth,

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ Bev Roberts, Interview with Author, October, 2010.

and produced a report that described the current conflicts and recommendations for moving towards a truly “by and for” model.²⁶⁹ These recommendations included moving to a smaller space, developing key relationships with other grassroots organizations to ensure that the homeless queer youth continued to have their basic needs met, and working to move away from a services framework and towards the leadership of young people at every level of the organization, including management and fundraising.

However, following this review and the development of these recommendations based on community feedback, the Board instead hired, and then fired due to mismanagement, a new Executive Director whose approach to these recommendations, according to interviewees, varied between hostile and indifferent. The organization then fired all of its youth staff and ended programs targeting trans and homeless youth, ultimately closing its physical site and going into a “cocooning phase” of re-evaluation.

After being closed for six months, District 202 re-emerged as a web-only presence – a “mobile delivery system”²⁷⁰ – with a new narrative and marketing strategy. They announced that *another* Executive Director had been hired, this time a marketing professional with no experience working in non-profits. This new Executive Director, Carl Dunn, in an interview with an online LGBT news blog, detailed major changes to

²⁶⁹ One of the consultants hired to conduct the evaluation of District 202 has generously shared with me the products of their year long assessment, including a compilation of the Task Force Recommendations, findings from interviews and focus groups conducted, which they describe thusly: “Interviews were conducted with: 18 adults - including LGBT community leaders, current and former donors & funders, former board members, youth workers, Twin Cities civic/political leaders, and former District 202 staff. Of these adult interviewees, 6 are people of color and 12 are white. 19 youth – all of these youth are, or have been, members of the District 202 community. Of these youth interviewees, 13 are people of color and 6 are white.”

²⁷⁰ Carl Dunn, writing on Facebook in response to the question “Where are you all located now?” writes, “After the community assessment, transition planning included Area 251 becoming a mobile delivery agency.” (October 20, 2010).

the structure, mission, and programs of District 202 and proclaimed, “We’re shifting the organization from being a social justice organization to being a social entrepreneurship organization.”²⁷¹ Although this rhetoric of “social entrepreneurship” was used widely on District 202’s website, Facebook page, and newsletters, there is little explanation for this transition. Perhaps the new leadership of District 202 believed such a change would be self-explanatory, as this seemingly abrupt departure in fact reflects an increasingly powerful set of symbolic and material shifts that are central to the changing imagination of contemporary queer social movements in the US.

The language and framework of “social entrepreneurship,” which seems to be antithetical to the history and mission of District 202, or at the very least, to queer social movements, mirrors a much broader shift in the non-profit sector. Particularly in the past ten years, there has been a notable and explicit turn towards neoliberal corporate “business” models of efficiency, flexibility, and value within the non-profit sector at large.²⁷² So when District 202 describes turning towards “social entrepreneurship” and “building better relationships with the corporate community in Minnesota,” they are echoing a larger neoliberal transformation, a marketization of the non-profit sector.

²⁷¹ James Sanna, “District 202 Names New Executive Director,” *The Column*, (October 26, 2009).

²⁷² See Raymond Dart, “The Legitimacy of Social Enterprise” in *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* and Howard Husock, “Nonprofit and For-Profit: Blurring the Line,” in *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, as well as the rise of such phenomenon as “venture philanthropy,” in which wealthy but “socially conscious” individuals “invest” in particular projects in order to achieve a particular social “value,” or “social return on investment” as a strategy to literally quantify the cost benefit of various social programs. In other words, this strategy – now required by the State of Minnesota’s Department of Employment and Economic Development of all applicants for Federal Stimulus funds – asks organizations to quantify how much money each dollar the state invests in their program will save the state in costs of incarcerating, sheltering, feeding, and providing health care by “diverting” individuals and “empowering” them towards employment and “self-sufficiency.”

Social entrepreneurship relies on discourses of individual ingenuity, “entrepreneurs” who recognize a “social problem” and utilize business models in order to make social change. A well-known example of this strategy – micro loans – seeks to “develop cultural capital” in order to ameliorate persistent poverty. Under this logic, the non-profit/state/foundation nexus becomes transformed into a wholly corporate remaking of the social according to market logics of “value,” including what kinds of bodies are “valuable” and which are expendable. This then begs a troubling question, and one that is especially significant in analyzing the shifts taking place at District 202: how can market logics solve the problems they have created? Of course to facilitate homonormative politics that centralize identity rather than inequality, and seek access to wealth and corporate power rather than critique it, social entrepreneurship makes perfect sense for a queer youth organization.

In *Social Entrepreneurship: New Models of Sustainable Social Change*, which editor Alex Nicholls intends to be “research primer” for the field, Nicholls describes a sea change in approaches to social change. Driven by what Nicholls characterizes as the “failure of the social market” to alleviate “problems” like persistent poverty, the lack of affordable housing, climate change, and a host of other social issues, this response is informed by the “outstanding success” of the multinational corporate framework of Walmart and other corporations. These corporations offer examples of “how to scale operations internationally and to maximize value creation through innovation and technology.”²⁷³ Relying on the logic of financial markets, as well as its rhetoric – flexibility, deliverables, metrics – this model also imagines that “social problems” exist

²⁷³ Alex Nicholls, *Social Entrepreneurship: New Models of Sustainable Social Change* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 2.

simply because no-one with enough ingenuity and creativity has come along to solve them. These kinds of “problems” can be solved through the actions of a business hero, the “entrepreneur” that is variously characterized throughout the text as an “innovator,” and “unrelenting, disruptive change-agent,” who can “move easily across sectors, often diversifying from their core mission to expand overall social impact and increase resource flows.”²⁷⁴

This logic has been widely taken up by non-profits, individualizing systemic inequality and transforming justice as the goal of social movements into “social value” as the goal of the “social economy.” This illustrates one key mechanism in which the existing disciplinary technologies and logics of the welfare state, already at work in non-profits, are wedded to neoliberal biopolitics in which the social is remade through the production of “valuable” bodies, subjects, and subjects of knowledge. The transition to a fully corporate rationale of “value production” – even within organizations that are funded in part by the state – fundamentally transforms the kind of social world and political imaginary enabled and produced through non-profits. Despite the rhetoric of innovation, creativity and social change, such logics are fundamentally not intended to reduce the inequities caused by capitalism or significantly redistribute wealth and resources. Instead such logics represent a tool of management, a technology for the discursive and material supervision, policing, and control of populations made surplus by capitalism.

Non-Profitization and Homonormativity

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

The shifts undertaken by District 202 are by no means isolated, and are particularly illustrative of the turn towards domesticity, consumption, and incorporation seen widely in queer social movements in the US. In the narrative District 202 produced about the changes it undertook, it repeatedly calls on a narrative of progress, of acceptance, of “mainstreaming.”²⁷⁵ In its new life without a physical space, District 202 exists primarily on the web, what it then called a “lean, tech savvy” social media tool. But it “partnered” with other organizations to create “mobile safe space” – basically subcontracting actual programming to other organizations that want to be “queer friendly” and using their brand as a substitute for safe space – anything with their logo becomes, apparently, “safe space.” Instead of a drop-in space in which youth could discuss the impact of police harassment and get hot food and connections to support systems, youth could go to yoga classes and do resume writing workshops. Provided, of course, that they can access the various suburban locations in which these programs are now held. As an example, take this email sent to members of the District 202 donor database. Notice the tone: no longer is District 202 raising awareness about an issue or program intended to address an issue, they are advertising the services of one of their “collaborative partners.” The subject of the email reads: “District 202 Makes January Hot! Yoga Begins January 23.” The text continues: “The yoga kickoff workshop starts this weekend! It's a great time to meet new people and get started on your yoga classes. By attending the workshop you will receive 10 free coupons for yoga.... Normally these

²⁷⁵ Carl Dunn, the Executive Director of District 202 often comments on how the goal of LGBT youth organizations, now mostly accomplished, is “mainstreaming.” For this reason, he says, there is no longer any need for a physical space, as LGBT youth are fully incorporated into the mainstream and are therefore “safe.”

classes cost \$150!”²⁷⁶ The targeted audience for such a program is primarily interested in networking and getting a good deal on a luxury product – and this email is a fair distance from the kinds of emails donors would have received just a few years before. By closing the physical space, the organization dramatically shifted away from serving youth who were homeless, youth for whom a physical place to go was paramount. In Minneapolis, and nationally, the majority of homeless queer youth are people of color. Instead, District 202 re-oriented their programming towards suburban youth, youth with access to computers, youth who had their basic needs met. Again, this meant a whiter, wealthier group of young people. This is, of course, a central aspect of the homonormative shift of District 202 as well because, as Kwame Holmes has reminded us, “homonormativity is a racial formation.”

In addressing the specific impact of this non-profit/foundation/state nexus on queer social movements, it is imperative to account for the simultaneous and intersecting turn towards homonormativity. In analyzing the shifts undertaken by District 202, as well as the stories told about those shifts, the racializing project of homonormativity becomes clear. “Mainstreaming,” as Carl Dunn terms it, is clearly only accessible for those LGBT young people with a certain amount of privilege – often white, gender-normative, and experiencing some level of class privilege. It is these young people who can disaggregate LGBT identity from queerness, from marginality, policing and discipline.²⁷⁷ Those young people who can “mainstream” according to a homonormative project of inclusion,

²⁷⁶ Email sent to author from District 202. January 13, 2010.

²⁷⁷ In response to an article on The Bilerico Project, by a local progressive queer author and activist, Carl Dunn wrote: “As a gay-for-pay youth worker, I’m seeing more LGBT youth mainstream these days when they have a supportive network of family and friends.” Carl Dunn in response to the article “When Queer Politics Meant No War and Fighting the Body Police,” Bilerico.com, (March 15, 2010).

“equality,” and privatization, are folded into and oriented towards life. For those who are not invited into the “mainstream,” but continue to be policed as a threat to it, District 202 is part of an apparatus of regulation and discipline that orients those bodies towards incarceration, poverty and shortened life.

In this context, the appeal to “mainstreaming” *produces* “the community” of LGBT youth itself, in this case a white(ned), (homo)normative subject. This subject has the resources and desire to participate in District 202’s online and outsourced programs, working to produce and perfect the normalized capitalist subject: self-supporting, employed, having particular kinds of sex in particular kinds of arrangements (meaning “safe,” monogamous, unpaid), and on a track towards, if not true social and political empowerment, at least limited and seemingly voluntary mobility within unquestioned constraints of continued racism, classism, and heterosexism. The narrative District 202 has produced about itself – the official history – has telling absences, however. Gone is any mention of race, of course, but also homelessness, poverty, or even homophobia – except in the past tense. For District 202 in this new homonormative age, queerness is no longer cathected to oppression – it has become a vehicle through which certain subjects, conversely, become folded into life. It is only within this context that Dunn, as the ED of District 202, could claim that coming out is no longer political – as he did in the email with which this chapter opens. District 202 sees itself as a social media marketing tool for those youth and corporate donors for whom LGBT identity is not political, instead of working to change the systems that make coming out for *some* youth always already political, because they are policed because of it, kicked out for it, or broke because they can’t “hide” it. This progress narrative is a ghost story, haunted by those who are

fundamentally outside such a “mainstream,” threatening Others who cannot be folded into life, as well as by the specter of the space itself and the struggles over youth power and social justice undertaken within it.

Conclusion

After its “cocooning” and re-emergence, District 202 existed for two years as a web-only trace, although it invoked the *idea* of youth power and physical space - almost as if the space had become its brand. All of the gimmicks they employed online to produce the effect of “youth voice” and mobilize the affective project of “youth empowerment” had no referents in real life - they were phantoms intended to be bought and sold. For instance, on the District 202 website, there was a tab entitled “youth voice” that led to a blog that adult staff update. The website flipped through photos of youth who were no longer involved, since there was no longer a space, but the photos were the property of District 202 and can be used even though the youth in them may profoundly object to the way they were being used. The photos intermixed old quotes about “youth empowerment” and “safe space” with new narratives about “marketable skills to actualize their potential in the world.”²⁷⁸

Importantly, District 202 used the *idea* of youth voice and youth power - which did at one time exist at District 202 and which they intentionally and forcefully silenced - in order to raise money. Their website prominently displayed a slideshow of black and white photos of former youth and youth staff with quotes superimposed over the images that say things like: “District 202 is an organization that works hard to understand youth

²⁷⁸ www.district202.org, accessed June 2010.

empowerment. – Supporter,” and “It’s a safe space where many young people can relax and be themselves. – Amy, donor.” These are youth staff that were fired, young people who lost access to a space and community, being used as props to raise money. Of course, right next to these photos was the icon “Click here to support District 202.”

Although this shift feels like the final word on the question of the limits of “by and for youth” – and, perhaps, on the larger question of the relationship between non-profits and social movements – this story has an interesting, and unfinished, coda. Following a truly offensive fundraising appeal in which District 202 exploited the recent suicides of gay teens in order to raise money, an anonymous group of individuals circulated a letter and online petition calling for Dunn’s resignation.²⁷⁹ People found a way to speak back through Facebook, blogs, and email, forcing District 202 to confront the narrative about itself that it continued to sell. In a searing indictment, this letter called out the way that the new organizational structure, what the authors call a “hollow marketing scheme,” disproportionately impacts poor queer and trans youth of color. They write: “The new structure of District 202 is inherently classist: by forcing queer youth to access District 202 via internet only, you have made the organization’s limited services utterly inaccessible to poor queer youth.”²⁸⁰ And Dunn did indeed step down, and following a year-long process of evaluation, District 202 gave up its 501(c)(3) status and became a program of a large social service organization, The Family Partnership. A

²⁷⁹ The fundraising appeal was entitled “On the Ground in Anoka Hennepin” (the location of the most recent suicide in Minnesota). It came complete with a new graphic and described the “actions” District 202 was engaged with, including “dedicating an intern” and “reaching out to their national partners.” It ends with the entreaty that “by supporting District 202 you will directly impact the lives of many LGBT youth in our community.”

²⁸⁰ Concerned Community Letter, November 4, 2010.

lasting impact of this transformation is the new awareness of the ongoing politics of space within the community. Jaime ended our interview by noting that “It’s interesting when young people bring it up, ‘We have to do something to save District 202!’ even though most people didn’t go to it. It really is the idea of the *space*.”²⁸¹

Now housed within an organization founded more than 100 years ago as a social service charity, District 202 has made quite the circuit: from youth liberation to social entrepreneurship to charity – from community to capital and back to compassion. That “by and for” mission, a direct critique of the savior model of charity, now subsumed within a charity, now co-opted and used as a way to refresh the disciplinary function of charity in the new neoliberal age of empowerment and community.

Despite the best intentions of many radical youth and youth workers, the non-profit structure wields its own power, and it tends towards maintaining existing systems of inequality. Now this is certainly not to suggest that this is inevitable. It is certainly not inevitable, but nonetheless, it can’t be ignored. For queer organizations, the convergence of the power structure built into non-profits with the neoliberal equality politics of homonormativity is acutely debilitating. In particular, maintaining a critique of capitalism – a critique that is necessary in order to combat the structural causes of racialized poverty – is very difficult when your continued existence is dependent on those who benefit from the system – whether individual donors, corporations, or private foundations. It is only through truly grappling with the power dynamics built into the non-profit system that we can attempt to build social movements capable of creating real change.

²⁸¹ Jaime, Interview with Author, December 2010.

Chapter Four

“A Stance of Undefeated Despair”: Navigating Crisis with the “Devil’s Tools”

The stance of undefeated despair is ‘that familiarity ... with every sort of rubble, including the rubble of words,’ that grief over cruelty and injustice, which is ‘without fear, without resignation, without a sense of defeat,’ and that ‘stance towards the world,’ which is the basis for the carrying-on-regardless that the struggle for emancipation and happiness requires. The stance of undefeated despair is a position from which to carve out a livable life when everything is organized to prevent you from doing so.²⁸²

- Avery Gordon

Actress Laverne Cox, famous for her role in *Orange is the New Black*, gave the 2014 keynote address at the annual National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) Creating Change conference. In that speech, she describes meeting and working with CeCe McDonald, who had, just weeks before, been released from prison after serving 19 months of a 41 month sentence. In June of 2011 CeCe, an African American trans woman, and a group of her friends, also African American, were accosted outside a bar in South Minneapolis by a group spouting racist and transphobic slurs. In the fight that ensued, one of the assailants, Dean Schmitz, ended up dead. Despite having been slashed across the face with a broken beer bottle, CeCe was the only one of the group to be arrested that night, and following a court battle in which it became clear that CeCe would never be seen by a jury as someone who had the right to defend her life, who had the right to live, CeCe accepted a guilty plea. As Laverne Cox said in her speech, “trans

²⁸² Avery Gordon, “The Prisoner’s Curse,” *Towards a Sociology of the Trace*. Herman Gray and Macarena Gomez-Barris, Eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 18.

women of color are not supposed to survive. So often, so often, people seem to prefer us to be dead.”²⁸³

Cox went on to describe meeting not only CeCe, but also a group of activists in Minneapolis who supported CeCe throughout her trial and incarceration. She named some of the leaders of that group by name and also called out TYSN, the Trans Youth Support Network.

She said:

And CeCe survived. And there are so many survivors out there, but CeCe’s survival and her resilience was made possible because – because she was brilliant and she was amazing and she led her support team in an amazing way. But it was also possible because of the work of grassroots activists in Minneapolis, Minnesota. If it were not for those activists, we would— the story of CeCe McDonald would be what mainstream media wanted to tell us about her. They made sure we knew the real story. They made sure that we knew that CeCe was attacked because she was black, because she was trans, because she was a woman. And that she was railroaded by the criminal justice system because of all those things. They’re doing amazing work in Minneapolis, but it’s with very few resources. They can use some resources in Minneapolis, Minnesota.²⁸⁴

I was not present at the conference, but I listened to her speech the following day with the other members of the TYSN board. TYSN’s staff member, Vienna Stanton, had just come from a television studio downtown where she and CeCe McDonald had filmed a segment for Melissa Harris Perry. We were listening to Cox’s speech in the context of a weekend-long strategic planning session, the second of three long weekends in which we discussed the future of TYSN. Our facilitator for that session asked us to listen to Cox’s speech, and reminded us that we were on a national stage now, that people would want to

²⁸³ Laverne Cox, Keynote Address, National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Creating Change Conference, February 5th, 2014.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

support our work, that the work TYSN does is important, necessary work. When Laverne Cox said, “they could use some resources in Minneapolis!” we listened as the audience of thousands cheered. It was an essential reminder, and a timely one, because we were, as a group, very tired.

Over the past six months, we had thought that perhaps we would need to close the doors. Perhaps the cost was simply too high. We had attempted a new leadership development program that left youth feeling patronized and frustrated, and then welcomed the youth who stuck it out onto a board where they felt dismissed and tokenized. We were trying to transform an organization created by mostly white adults into an organization led by trans youth of color. Everyone in the room shared a similar vision for what they’d like to see in TYSN: a youth led space where trans youth, especially trans youth of color, could share resources and knowledge, come into their power, and work together towards a more just world. Despite that shared vision, though, the path to achieving it remained murky and fraught with frustration and betrayal.

My involvement with TYSN began in 2008 when I moved to Minneapolis to begin graduate school. When I entered the Minneapolis scene of queer youthworkers, non-profiters, genderqueer folks, and trans activists, District 202 had begun its slow death and people were frustrated and sad and lonely for each other and missed the promise that had been made to them through and in the idea of queer youth power at District 202. In that same year, TYSN, an organization created by youthworkers at District and a couple of other youth organizations in the Cities over the period of 2005-2007, began to announce itself, in part through hiring a new Director who had been a fierce youth advocate at District 202 and who believed in the vision of youth power

once dangled there and jerked away. Having the good fortune of being close friends with that person, and, at that time only months removed from my life as a youthworker, I began organizing with TYSN, on the edges, with hope that all of my work on the Non-Profit Industrial Complex could be put to good use by this organization that was attempting to chart a different path.

TYSN is an interesting example for this project because it has, through both intention and intentional inaction, *not* become a formal non-profit. It does not have its own 501(c)(3) tax-exempt designation, but is instead fiscally sponsored by another organization that is a 501(c)(3). Fiscal sponsorship is often a step fledgling organizations take on their way to non-profit status. It is a way to begin raising money, and have that money be tax-exempt for the donors, without having achieved tax-exempt status. A small minority of organizations, organizations that are explicitly critical of the NPIC, use fiscal sponsorship as a way to side-step the legal restrictions placed on 501(c)(3) organizations, specifically those around board composition, bylaws, and other process requirements. TYSN's decision to remain fiscally sponsored is due to both of those reasons: capacity and critique. In practice, this status means that donations made to TYSN come through the fiscal agent and legally, their board is the Board of Directors with fiduciary responsibility for TYSN. TYSN, though, has its own board, the board on which I serve. It is technically an advisory board, although in practice it deals with the budget, with fundraising, with staff supervision, with programming, with strategic planning, and with setting organizational priorities. TYSN is, oddly, lucky to have a fairly indifferent fiscal agent. Its simultaneous distance and proximity to the non-profit structure makes TYSN particularly illustrative as a case study. It exists in what Ruth Wilson Gilmore refers

to as “the shadow of the shadow state,” and while not a non-profit itself, certainly operates within the NPIC.²⁸⁵

Now six years later, my relationship with TYSN has deepened and intensified and the stakes are much higher – high enough to leave me feeling weak, grasping, frustrated, defeated, and, sometimes, hopeful. Sometimes proud. Over these years, TYSN worked towards shifting from an organization of youthworkers focused on making social services more accessible to trans youth to becoming an organization fully led by trans youth, and focused on their power, rather than on the services they must sometimes access. That project of transformation remains unfinished and has not and will not come without cost. In fits and starts, in moments of solidarity and distance, frustration and connection, a shared vision of youth leadership has been articulated, although the map from here to there remains fuzzy and blocked by barriers both seen and unseen.

For what follows I have gathered together my fellow travelers, former and current TYSN youth and adult board members, youth and adult staff, grant writers, and supporters of various stripes, and asked them to consider their experiences with TYSN, with movements for justice, with violence and fear and solidarity. Why, I asked, if everyone involved in the organization believes in youth leadership, have we been unable

²⁸⁵ Ruth Wilson Gilmore, “In the Shadow of the Shadow State,” *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*. Incite! Women of Color Against Violence, Eds. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007). Gilmore writes: “The grassroots groups that have formally joined the third sector are in the shadow of the shadow state. They are not direct service providers but often work with the clients of such organizations as well as with the providers themselves. They generally are not recipients of public funds although occasionally get government contracts to do work in jails or shelters or other institutions. They have detailed political programs and deep social and economic critiques. ... They try to pay some staff to promote and proliferate the organization’s analysis and activity even if most participants in the group are unpaid volunteers. The government is often the object of their advocacy and their antagonisms ... but the real focus of their energies is ordinary people whom they wish fervently to organize against their own abandonment.” p. 47. 186

to become a youth led organization? Why has it been so hard? Why, despite that, are we all still there? I had originally imagined that TYSN would offer a counterpoint to the three previous case studies, an example of how to do it all differently, to resist the co-optation of the non-profit industrial complex. It doesn't, exactly. What follows is an attempt to reckon with what it *does* offer.

I begin by analyzing how the violence out of which TYSN emerged, and which structures the lives of its youth constituency, impacts its understanding of itself as an organization. In the section that follows I examine how TYSN has positioned itself in relationship to the social services on which its youth participants rely, services that are necessary if trans youth of color are ever to occupy full power within the organization, but which seem simultaneously to prevent the entire project of youth leadership itself. I then turn to the question of funding through three related but distinct moments in which TYSN grappled with the dynamics of incorporation, mainstreaming, and the impossibility of representing trans women of color through the single-issue lens of homonormativity. I close with a discussion of how these various issues have come to bear on the question of non-profit status as TYSN considers whether to pursue 501(c)(3) status. My intention in this chapter is to explore the forces that make the non-profit form particularly inhospitable to young trans women of color, as well as to document the strategies that those trans young people have used to take and wield what one Board member calls “the devil’s tool,” the non-profit structure.

Present Absence and Traces of Violence

For me, to think of traces often means to think of the materiality of the trace - to think about what it is, what it was, and what its possibilities are.

Social landscapes are emptied and filled with new meaning, memories refashioned in the 'name' of unity, and identities crafted as stand-ins for violence – all leave a trace of not only what they 'are' in current manifestations, but also what they could be, what they might have been, and what they have been historically.²⁸⁶

- Sarah Banet-Weiser

Trauma is a frozen state - a hold - [and] non-profits are post-traumatic stress institutions, which is why we hold on to them so hard. Most non-profits are visionary responses that intend to right a wrong, but they come out of trauma, and play out the shit that happened the first time.²⁸⁷

- Nora

TYSN was created by a small group of youthworkers housed at District 202, YouthLink, a homeless youth organization in Minneapolis, and Face2Face, another homeless youth organization located in St. Paul. TYSN wasn't a project of these organizations, but a project of these youthworkers. They were responding to what they understood to be a crisis, a war being waged against the youth they served. The story we tell about the creation of TYSN is this: in 2004 (perhaps) there was a series of instances of violence against trans women of color in the community, and a group of youth workers and youth (although the bit about youth participation is perhaps apocryphal, and perhaps we all knew that all along) came together to challenge local social service providers to be more accessible to trans youth, so that those youth could be safer and get their basic needs met. In my recent conversations with the TYSN community, the actual events were fairly hazy. When did it happen? One youth member thought late 2007. One thought 2004. Another was sure 2005. Or maybe early 2006? I was told that there had been

²⁸⁶ Sarah Banet-Weiser, "Traces in Social Worlds," *Towards a Sociology of the Trace*. Herman Gray and Macarena Gomez-Barris, Eds. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

²⁸⁷ Nora, Interview with Author, February 2014.

sensationalized and awful newspaper coverage, so I could find out the details that way. I searched the local news media during that time frame for “transgender,” “transsexual,” “shot,” “shooting,” any of the most sensationalized terms I could think of, all to no avail. Later I found out that like for so many other trans victims and survivors of violence, the story itself was made invisible through the press’ use of the victim’s legal name rather than her preferred name, thus erasing her trans identity.

As I spoke with my compatriots, the degree of violence, the story of violence, the cost of violence rippled underneath our conversations always. That TYSN was created as a response to violence against trans women of color, that we entered the national stage through a story of violence against another trans woman of color, that in the interim so many young trans women had both come to and left TYSN because of violence, that our progress towards becoming an organization led by trans youth of color was marked and blocked by violence – this emerged as a key aspect in understanding how TYSN remains haunted. And the story of this ordinary violence, the trauma out of which TYSN emerged, was an example of what Herman Gray and Macarena Gómez-Barris call a “social trace,” the “excess in the collision between structural projects and social experience.”²⁸⁸ As a social trace, it “leaves few material and social historical registers.”²⁸⁹

One of the founders of TYSN shared with me his memory of the story, but was unable to share any names or details because he had been a youthworker and she had been one of the youth he worked with – to have shared her story would have been unethical. He put me in touch with a former youth member of District 202 who had been friends with one of the victims of violence, and she described what happened:

²⁸⁸ Herman Gray and Macarena Gómez-Barris, “Traces in the Social World,” p. 4.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

The morning of Veronica getting shot ...I ran into a mutual friend and neither of us knew what happened. And I called the hospital and she was in the hospital and so me and my little sister caught the bus back to Minneapolis and we ended up sitting in the waiting room and we saw her get rolled past and I knew it was her. She got shot nine times and he basically left her for dead. One of the bullets ricocheted into her eye so she lost an eye. And he really wanted her dead - he had people who was trying to kill her. So it got serious in the neighborhoods where we stayed and hung out. During that time, things really changed around District and just around the neighborhood because we started hanging around in packs. We tried to embrace Veronica and embrace each other 'cause a lot of us were afraid to really go out and were looking over our shoulders. Some of girls did walk around with knives and mace and they had to use them. They had to do what they had to do.²⁹⁰

Two youth I interviewed described the would-be murderer as her “boyfriend” or “secret lover,” the adults described him as a john. All agreed that he found out about her trans identity and tried to kill her. Those interviewees who had been youthworkers at the time at local non-profits like District 202 and YouthLink shared that this was just one among a series of instances of violence directed at trans and gender-non-conforming people, though it was the most serious, and the one that galvanized the community. Following her shooting, youth and adults at District 202 organized a candlelight vigil and a march from District 202 to the Hennepin County Medical Center where Veronica was a patient.

Duke, one of the board members/youthworkers narrates this origin story:

It was a response to violence that was happening to youth I was working with. There were lots of things happening to trans women of color on the street, violence stuff. And the formation came out of that, through District 202. The conversations were being held about how as organizations we could help support these women better. What could I as a, YouthLink employee, do to support these folks better? What were we not doing? For me it felt like it was outside conversations I was already having within the organizations, so it felt like a youthworker response. [There were] some young people. *It felt like it was something, and nothing else was happening.* No other institutions or groups of people were responding,

²⁹⁰ Latasha, Interview with Author, February 2014.

[though] certainly in community, [in] trans women's communities they were gathering.²⁹¹

It felt like it was something, and nothing else was happening, he says. Why this, though? One question that emerged for me in my interviews was “why a non-profit?” Why was the impulse, following these instances of violence, to create a new organization? Vienna, a white trans woman who was a young person at that time and who eventually became the Executive Director of TYSN, reflects that “it was what they were rooted in. From my perspective I don't know that they questioned it. This is what you do.”²⁹² Further, she said, “I don't think that anyone was surprised, to the point of not even questioning it, that the organizational structure was modeled after non-profits.” Given the social location of these youth workers the appropriateness, the utility, the *right*-ness of the non-profit structure *just made sense*.

Another adult board member, who had also been a youth worker during that period, offers a counterpoint. For Randy, TYSN was created out of fear. Whose fear, I asked?

[That] fear was way more about the adults [than the youth], because [the youth] were pretty used to it. “We have to *do* something!” There was also some knowledge that - you know how in non-profits there are waves of people that come in and out? A wave of people came in and were like “Oh my God, these youth are doing sex work, and you guys all know about it and what are you doing?!”²⁹³

For whatever constellation of reasons, the violence that is ever-present in the lives of young trans women of color was newly seen by the adult youth workers with whom they worked – as well as it should have been – and it was brought forward by those youth

²⁹¹ Duke, Interview with Author, March 2014. Emphasis mine.

²⁹² Vienna, Interview with Author, March 2014.

²⁹³ Randy, Interview with Author, April 2014.

workers, people who have access to such spaces and such registers, as a problem to be addressed through the non-profit structure.

In the epigraph for this section, taken from her afterword to Herman Gray and Macarena Gómez-Barris' anthology on "social traces," Sara Banet-Weiser offers critical insight for thinking through this originary violence. "Social landscapes," she writes, "are emptied and filled with new meaning, memories refashioned in the 'name' of unity, and identities crafted as stand-ins for violence – all leave a trace of not only what they 'are' in current manifestations, but also what they could be, what they might have been, and what they have been historically."²⁹⁴ In the wake of this violence, violence that was erased even as it happened by the same social forces of racism, capitalism, and transphobia that engendered it, a memory about that violence was crafted by those in proximity to it – not the trans youth of color themselves – but the adult youth workers with marginally more access, more social power. Over the years of my involvement with TYSN I have witnessed as we grapple with that memory, as we are haunted by it, as we craft identities as stand-ins for that violence.

But the scene of violence – both the particular instances of violence and the ongoing structural violence – out of which TYSN emerged, poses a profound problem for its institutionalization, for it as an organization. Despite having been created as a response to violence faced by young trans women of color, trans women of color have been the group of youth *least* able to participate in TYSN in a lasting and meaningful way over the years I've been involved. While many young trans women of color have been involved in various ways at various moments, organizational leadership has been

²⁹⁴ Sarah Banet-Weiser, "Traces in Social Worlds."

held almost exclusively by a multi-racial group of trans-masculine people and by white trans women. Young trans women of color, faced as they are with constant threat, with overwhelming exclusion from legal employment, with having to erase themselves and their identities in order to access shelter, or having their identities forcibly stripped through exclusionary policies and constant policing – the trans women TYSN was created *for* occupy a category Lisa Marie Cacho calls “ineligible for personhood.”²⁹⁵ Cacho describes those categories of people who are always already criminal “as populations subjected to laws but refused the legal means to contest those laws as well as denied both the political legitimacy and moral credibility necessary to question them.”²⁹⁶ The denial of CeCe McDonald’s right to fight for her life, her “audacity to survive,” is confirmation of this ineligibility; CeCe accepted a plea because she knew she could never have been seen by a jury as a person who deserved to live. For Cacho, “to be ineligible for personhood is a form of social death; it not only defines who does not matter, it also makes mattering meaningful.”²⁹⁷

The difficulty of the social exclusion and ineligibility of the youth that TYSN was created to serve, but *by* whom it actually would like to be *led*, is more than the obvious difficulty of doing anything – staying alive and eating and being housed – while occupying a category of social death. As I have argued throughout the dissertation, non-profits are structures intended to uphold and police the systems that produce the differential conditions of social life. This function is *built into* the structure of the non-profit system, and it does not go away even when occupied by those it is intended to

²⁹⁵ Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), p. 6.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*

police. This impossibility is one we grapple with often within TYSN. I asked one of my fellow board members, Logan, another white trans-masculine adult, to reflect on why the work of TYSN has been so hard, so frustrating, and why, despite wide agreement that we would like to shift towards a youth-led structure, have we been unable to do so over so many years. He replied:

Racism and classism make it really hard. The two people who had the idea [for TYSN] are both white people with class privilege, although neither of them always had class privilege. So this is another example of an organization started by people who had the capacity to do that, who could get a grant. *But when the mission is to subvert the very institutions that made it possible to get a grant, it has to be hard, because you're using a tool that is designed to maintain a structure that you're trying to dismantle. So there's a tension between money and resources and doing the work.*²⁹⁸

Here he names the fundamental paradox of the non-profit system, the impossibility of subverting the structure the organization relies upon to exist. But Logan went on to describe what this impossibility *feels* like, how it is experienced on a day-to-day basis. He said:

But [actually] what I mean is interpersonally, between advisory board members, it's been a lot of really intense anti-racism and anti-classism, and anti-ageism work, and [that's] why we are always doing process and why it is so frustrating. *We are really trying to bring communities together who are not supposed to be together.* I want for TYSN to be a space where individuals work that out and build together, but that's the behind the scenes work, and then there's the face of TYSN that we need to get a grant. [There's also] transportation challenges and who has eaten today and who has to work at the last minute and who can make meetings. Some people come to the board without their basic needs met and some people have access to excess and that is really hard to set aside to make a decision about board process.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ Logan, Interview with Author, March 2014. Emphasis mine.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.* Emphasis mine.

It is not just hard, I would argue, but impossible to set aside this profound imbalance of resources – even though it is the systems that produce these very imbalances that TYSN challenges. This imbalance has very different costs for youth members. One youth member, Sophia, who is currently the only trans woman of color on the board, describes what this imbalance means in practice:

From a youth perspective, it's trans youth support network. There's a clothing closet, there's a leadership academy, there's a speakers bureau to get you a little side cash, but there comes a place where people get invited to programs, but there's no conversation about what you are sacrificing to be there. Should I eat or get transportation? Should I get make-up to make myself passable? They're brought in to agencies and told they can help out but there's no conversation about your needs, about what you need to be here, what you need to better yourself to move up the ladder to stability.³⁰⁰

I remember very clearly Sophia expressing this in a board meeting, and thinking with frustration - and a significant degree of shame at my own frustration - “doesn't she know we all knew that?” But Kevin, another youth member, expresses the same frustration:

That's why that's been hard these past two years, we've provided bus tokens and expected that to make transportation less of an issue, but we have to consider that we're giving people two bus tokens, [one] to get home and [another] to get back, but we haven't considered that in the past seven days, you've had to get to work, to pick up a prescription, to get out of a bad situation – that you don't have the token to get to the leadership academy [anymore]. Trans folks are so under-resourced.

The difficulty then is twofold. Clearly the level of social exclusion, and the lack of resources provided by TYSN to combat that exclusion, has presented real barriers for trans women of color especially, making their sustained participation in TYSN impossible. The second problem is much trickier: *we all already knew about it and couldn't figure out what to do*. It wasn't as if any of us didn't know this would be a

³⁰⁰ Sophia, Interview with Author, February 2014.

problem or that when Sophia or Kevin described the dynamic it was surprising to anyone involved. It is this problem, then, to which I turn.

The Question of Services

TYSN was created to hold social services accountable for providing the very services that might provide at least some measure of possibility for trans women to participate in TYSN. The mechanism through which this was supposed to happen was the Network Collaborative, a group of willing and interested social services – shelters, clinics, and advocacy organizations, primarily – that would meet quarterly and work towards accessibility. Concrete changes to paperwork, policies, and positions were expected, and over the years, while there have been some successes – one free clinic, for instance, has lobbied their executive leadership and will soon be offering hormone prescriptions – little substantive change has occurred. But, nonetheless, social services *love* the network collaborative. It's generally a group for progressive social workers, many of them white queer folks – similar, in fact, to the youthworkers who started TYSN - who wish their organizations were more radical, less punitive, more expansive, less *social-service-y*. Through the Network Collaborative, TYSN has given training after training after training after training. And despite this, youth continue to be kicked out of shelters, given impossible hoops to jump through to retain access to their services, have demeaning interactions with school social workers, and are so heavily policed that just being out in the world is a war to be waged. Eventually we decided we would no longer give any trainings that weren't paid trainings, so at least youth members could get some benefit. The fundamental problem, of course, is that the social service system itself is

not designed to actually end poverty, but rather to discipline those who experience it. Despite this, reliance on inadequate and dehumanizing social services is one common feature that the vast majority of youth that TYSN works with experience.

This paradox has made TYSN's approach to providing, or even working with, social services especially fraught. In the past year, as it focuses on its transition to youth leadership, especially through the new leadership academy, TYSN has put the Network Collaborative on hold. Nonetheless, the frenzied requests from case managers, school social workers, teachers, youth workers, and many others continue to roll in – at a rate far beyond what TYSN could ever respond to, even if it was the only thing it did. The desperation people have for *something*, for some *help*, is similar to the affective response that led to the creation of TYSN in the first place. It is something, when nothing else is happening.

Harrison, another of the four of us white trans-masculine adults on the board, expressed his position with regards to social services – the position that most closely mirrors my own. He says:

Social services are meant to stabilize the social situation we're in now and provide band-aid solutions for folks that are being structurally hurt by the system. We want to get to the root causes of the violence and poverty. We see that social services are a necessary stop gap but they're never going to be a solution, and they are so often really premised on breaking down people's dignity and taking away peoples self determination – that's structurally how those systems are built.³⁰¹

But other people, especially youth members, see more possibility, or at least necessity.

Malik, an African American trans masculine young person said: “If I had it my way, we would [provide services]. I just think it's really necessary. I'd love to see a queer

³⁰¹ Harrison, Interview with Author, March 2014.

YouthLink, where you can just go and get all the resources. ‘Cause YouthLink is horrible but queer youth still need all the stuff, someone to help them get food stamps.’³⁰²

I’ve dreamt of this too; perhaps finding a space where the downstairs is a meeting and drop-in space and upstairs we have a few apartments that are available for emergencies or as part of the compensation for youth staff? That would solve so many problems! But then I am reminded what social services are actually like, how punitive they are, where youth become “clients” to be managed instead of peers. Sophia expressed that perspective, thinking out loud:

What is the paperwork required? Do we have to report runaway youth? Are there quotas? What does it entangle? Just thinking about Avenues [for Homeless Youth] and YouthLink, just thinking about there, they walk on eggshells around youth: “I want to help you but I have to help you within these guidelines, and if I can’t I’ll just take you to the clothing closet to pacify you.” Because that’s state money, they’re very “dot the I’s and cross the T’s.”³⁰³

In previous chapters I have discussed at length the power dynamics embedded in the social service model. Everyone involved in TYSN, youth workers and young folks alike, know this model, have participated in it to some degree, and even recognize that they can’t simply “refuse” it. The power dynamic of social services, functioning as it does through racialized bodies, operates even in the absence of those services, simply through racialized bodies in proximity to one another, each having very different needs and very different access to the resources to meet those needs. Xavier, a former TYSN board member, reminds us why this is: “the non-profit sector developed out of missionary work, which developed out of genocide and conquest. The only way to achieve ‘success’

³⁰² Malik, Interview with Author, April 2014.

³⁰³ Sophia, Interview with Author, February 2014.

then is to conform to the standard of those missionaries trying to teach ‘skills.’”³⁰⁴ The twofold mission of TYSN, to hold social service providers accountable through the network collaborative and to foster youth leadership through programming like the leadership academy, was an attempt to navigate this dynamic.

And, for Duke, the reality is that “TYSN has been offering social service the entire time off the record, off the books. I don’t think you can do youth work without offering services. It’s hard for me to see someone struggling and not offer support.”³⁰⁵ The critical piece is in recognizing and intentionally resisting the paternalistic gaze. Instead, he says, “it’s a community thing, it’s about holding each other. We’ve been doing it for years and not getting funded or paid or recognized for it. ‘Cause we’re working with young people who are in survival mode.”³⁰⁶

In this most recent round of strategic planning, in fact the same day we listened to Laverne Cox remind us of the necessity of this work, the revolutionary value there is in loving other trans people, we as a board clarified the values that inform our approach to social services and the vision of TYSN’s work in the world. ‘Survive, dream, build,’ we said. We decided TYSN’s work is to support trans folks in *surviving* the systems with which they must engage, create the space necessary to *dream* of another world, and then gather the resources and power necessary to *build* it. What this vision will look like in practice is as yet unknown – intentionally. We all believe that it must be youth themselves who decide how to navigate this social service dynamic. Duke believes “the

³⁰⁴ Xavier, Interview with Author, April, 2014.

³⁰⁵ Duke, Interview with Author, March, 2014.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid*

answer ... is to not have people like me there, [but] to have young people there, to chat with [youth who need services], to [have them] be in charge and to let them decide.”³⁰⁷

For Vienna, the outgoing Executive Director, in reflecting on the impact this dynamic has had on her as a young person coming into a staff leadership position, the social service model is about much more than services, it’s about how we are slotted into the project of non-profitization. For her, through “exposure to social workers and social services through trainings, or just being a person who relies on social services, there are all these professional expectations that keep you either *scared* or *angry* – scared you aren’t enough, or angry you aren’t given opportunities.”³⁰⁸ Proximity to the social service system is pedagogical, it teaches how to relate to bodies with more than or less than us, how to naturalize that difference, how to grasp, how to be grateful, what expectations to have of those living in poverty or of those who “help.” This is a function of power.

For Avery Gordon, the “the idiom of social death speaks of the captive, but it only partially addresses him or her.”³⁰⁹ According to Orlando Patterson, the idiom of social death teaches “how ordinary people should relate to the living who are dead.”³¹⁰

Compassion, I maintain, *is one such relation*. As I illustrate in Chapter One, *compassion*, the affective stance of the social service system, *is a mode of governmentality*, one that buttresses and stabilizes the more overtly policing modes of power analyzed so effectively by Avery Gordon and Lisa Marie Cacho. Although the affective response to the violence experienced by trans women of color – horror – was one that I share, and the

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁸ Vienna, Interview with Author, March 2014.

³⁰⁹ Avery Gordon, “The Prisoner’s Curse.” P. 41.

³¹⁰ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). Quoted in Avery Gordon. 200

practice of that affect – the creation of a non-profit – was likely one I would have wholeheartedly participated in, and one, on the balance, I am grateful was undertaken, it did nonetheless emerge from a project of compassion. I’m not arguing that the compassion exhibited by those individuals who witnessed such violence and who felt called to action was misplaced. I am, however, instead aware that compassion itself is imbricated in the mechanics of maintaining a neoliberal social and economic order, an order stabilized by a social service system that is, by design, inadequate to the need.

As I noted earlier, that TYSN’s main constituency is “ineligible for personhood” poses a problem not just for the internal project of crafting an organization in which trans women of color can actually participate. It also constrains TYSN’s ability to pass in the non-profit system, its ability to get funded, or at least funded to create the kinds of infrastructures that would be necessary for trans youth of color to take leadership in the organization. This is due, in large part, to the discordance of TYSN’s work and constituency with the project of homonormativity, and the degree to which even the presence of TYSN and its members is disruptive to the mood and materiality of homonormative capitalism.

Funding as a Technology of Control

As I have argued throughout the dissertation, the non-profit system as a whole relies on a fundamentally unsustainable relationship to capital, both materially and discursively. As an alternative to the welfare state, non-profits must never seem too dependent, too needy, and so must constantly promise to solve the “problem” they seek to confront within one grant cycle or to woo donors with the promise that their one

financial contribution will fix broad social inequalities. TYSN, despite not having tax-exempt status, is nonetheless *not* exempt from this dynamic. In this section I explore TYSN's relationship with funding in order to contextualize how its location "in the shadow of the shadow state" impacts its political project.

One of the first acts the small group of youth workers who created TYSN undertook was submitting a grant to the Minneapolis Foundation to hire a full time staff member. They received that grant, and since that time, with a salary to maintain, TYSN has been reliant on grant funding to survive. Although much effort has been put into cultivating a grassroots individual donor base to offset this dependence, TYSN would be unable to retain its staff and run its programs without grant funding. When I began organizing with TYSN, the sole staff member wrote all the grants personally, and as such had little time to develop programming, build relationships with new young people, or grow the organization towards youth leadership, despite his desire to do so. When he left the organization a former youth member was hired as the interim and then permanent ED, and she was clear when she was hired that grant writing and fundraising were not her areas of expertise. As a working class white trans woman who had experienced homelessness and come up through social services, Vienna has spoken many times about not only doubting her abilities in this area and how seriously she would be taken by funders as the representative of TYSN, but also having a great deal of disdain for the entire project, for dealing with wealthy donors and for jumping through funder hoops. To enable her to focus on building youth leadership programming, TYSN hired Harrison, one of the white trans masculine Board members, for the grand sum of \$2000 per year, to write grants. Harrison remembers:

I came in with very little grant writing experience – with formal education and pretty groomed by life to do that work, but without formal training. And Vienna, similarly, had pretty minimal experience dealing with funders and fundraising. We were making it up a lot of the time. We had some amazing people in the community who had been grant writers or who were in the foundation world who helped us, so I think we were way better resourced than many ... Most of our [financial] support came from small social justice community foundations doing gen[eral] op[erating] support who wanted to hear our vision. While those really felt like a challenge at the time, those were super sympathetic funders and a lot of that was that we were pretty young and just coming out of being the new org and people were excited.³¹¹

Between them they were able to create a fairly sustainable fiscal arrangement for TYSN. And due to Vienna's work in building relationships in the community, she doubled our individual donor revenue from \$8000 to \$16000 in 2012. But still it never felt like enough. There was always more to do than could ever be done, and we really wanted to be able to *pay* youth to attend programming, something we recognized was necessary in order for those most impacted by racism, transphobia, and capitalism to access TYSN. Eventually we wanted to hire full time youth staff, enough staff so that we really could work on holding social services accountable at the same time as we offered meaningful youth leadership programming.

After years of applying to national funders and major local private foundations with little success we received word that we had been approved for a grant from the Progressive Center Foundation for \$100,000 over three years. This would enable us to hire a part time Program Director and two youth staff. The experience of actually getting the Progressive Center check in the door, however, is instructive.

³¹¹ Harrison, Interview with Author, March 2014.

With the tagline “Change. Not Charity.” one would think that this particular funder would be a great fit for TYSN. That was, unfortunately, not the case. Harrison described how “as we were trying to make the jump to bigger or national funding we didn’t understand the difference between a goal, a strategy, an outcome, and a deliverable.”³¹² Which, according to foundations, are apparently *vastly* different things, and aren’t you just a charming country rube if you think an outcome is in *any* way similar to a deliverable. For Vienna, it was “gratifying to be seen by a national foundation after spending so long being unseen or misunderstood, but then we were right back with the same old bullshit using language that meant nothing to us. And we still are trying to translate it, no matter how many times I try to explain it I just don’t think it will ever make sense. . . . We went through four drafts [of their required workplan], until finally they accepted it and they gave us the money.”³¹³ They literally withheld the money until TYSN submitted a work plan that correctly used their framing. I asked Harrison and Vienna to explain exactly what it was that they wanted from us that we couldn’t provide. Harrison explained:

And you know, I think though they have pretty clear social justice values and we are an organization it makes a great deal of sense for them to fund – we are doing queer youth organizing. But what they needed from us, like what our work plan looked like, what they needed from us in terms of deliverables, was so far outside our [scope]. We were trying to live our values, we were being led by someone who had come up through the ranks, but she didn’t know - and none of us did - how to do it, and no one had the time to figure it out. They wanted a work plan that . . . promised clear deliverables in a certain way. Our tension was that we wanted to leave ourselves space, ‘cause we’re trying to transition into youth leadership so we can’t say what our programs are going to be [over time], and none of us had the savvy because of who was in the organization.³¹⁴

³¹² Harrison, Interview with Author, March 2014.

³¹³ Vienna, Interview with Author, March 2014.

³¹⁴ Harrison, Interview with Author, March 2014.

The foundation demanded a three-year plan with clear numbers and outcomes, certainly not leaving room for youth to completely rework the entire organization! And, in fact, the work of trying to force our program ideas into their framework *did* have an immediate impact. I clearly remember a discussion at a board meeting about youth frustrations with the leadership academy and pushing back against that frustration by saying “this program was what youth developed last year!” But one young person replied, “this is *not* what we created.” Vienna reflected:

There’s something about the rigidity of it, in part the language. We need to see a, b, and c. And we’re like “well, we don’t entirely know what’s next.” They want our three-year plan and we’re figuring out the three-month plan. ... What’s an outcome mean to this foundation? What’s a measurable outcome to this foundation? And what’s it mean to us? Nothing.³¹⁵

Somehow in the translation process something key had been lost. Youth felt that their vision was mangled by the attempt to fit it into the constraints of funders, while Harrison and Vienna struggled to get even this now-compromised vision past the foundation censors.

And as Harrison recounts, this rigidity is not confined just to the Progressive Center Foundation, but is a sector-wide phenomenon. In fact, he argues, this feature of foundation funding is tremendously damaging to social movements, preventing organizations from doing the deep internal work necessary to truly build trust across difference and craft long-term strategies, and instead pushing them towards short-term campaigns. He goes on:

³¹⁵ *Ibid*

I just think of the depth of the work, and how it's so slow - the internal work that TYSN is trying to do to reshape our organization and it's so slow and so deep. It's not the *only* kind of work that's necessary, but it *is* necessary to get us to where we need to be as movements. That's what we've been trying to do for a while, but that's just not what anyone wants to fund. People want to fund an organization that's robust and deep rooted, but they don't want to fund how much work it takes to get there.³¹⁶

Foundations simply do not want to fund process, to fund the slow moving relationship building and infrastructure development that is necessary for real sustainability. Instead, they demand quantifiable results. Even grants that explicitly fund “base-building” or “movement-building” still demand quantifiable outcomes within the one or two year grant cycle: a certain number of contacts, a certain number of summits, and the development of a platform, perhaps.

This feature of foundation funding is, ultimately, a market logic. Foundations, built as they are on corporate profits, were key engines of the discursive neoliberalization of the non-profit sector. Foundations exert profound discursive and material power by simply demanding that non-profits adopt their frameworks of knowledge for measuring risk, success – even value itself. In the case of the Progressive Center grant, the incredible rigidity of their workplan is intended to standardize information and thereby monitor the exposure to risk of their “investment.” This, like the example of social entrepreneurship in the previous chapter, illustrates the significant degree to which market logics have come to dominate even progressive grassroots organizing.

³¹⁶ Harrison, Interview with Author, March 2014.

This dynamic is even more important as major national funders like the Ford Foundation get into the business of funding LGBT issues.³¹⁷ The demands placed on organizations seeking this funding will only increase, and smaller organizations, for whom sophisticated tracking and evaluation software is out of reach, will be locked out. And those organization that *do* receive such funding might find themselves, as TYSN did, having their vision distorted by the professionalization, adultism, class privilege, and savvy demanded by that funding.

Foundation funding is not, however, the only aspect of the non-profit system with which TYSN grapples. In the next section I closely analyze one instance in which the stakes of mainstreaming were laid bare.

Proximate Danger, Exceptionality, and the Philanthropic Stance

*To an audience full of economic privilege, do I ask for charity to pass on to trans and gender non-conforming youth, who are in much need of their resources? Or do I ask for their solidarity, with trans youth and our greater community? In asking for their charity, I must encourage a relaxed atmosphere and affinity. In asking for solidarity, I must ask us all to reflect on our privileges and place within these systems of oppression.*³¹⁸

-Vienna Stanton

³¹⁷ In November of 2012 the Ford Foundation announced the 50 million dollar “Advancing LGBT Rights Initiative” which will focus on equal rights, bullying, media, and “developing a diverse, coordinated, collaborative and effective field of leaders and organizations working to secure LGBT rights.” One local funder who attended the grantee convening at which they announced this new initiative remarked that they foresee very few, if any, organizations in the Midwest actually receiving any of this money because the requirements in terms of evaluation and reporting are so sophisticated only organizations with fairly large budgets already would have the scope to even apply.

³¹⁸ Vienna Stanton, “Solidarity: Calling Out a Corporate Sponsor at a Pro-LGBT Event” *The Bilerico Project*, October 23, 2011.

In the fall of 2011, TYSN was invited to speak on the topic of “community” at the annual National Coming Out Day luncheon held by Quorum, the Minneapolis LGBT chamber of commerce. What followed offers an interesting encapsulation of many of the pressures TYSN faces as it navigates wealthy donors, a mainstreaming and corporatizing LGBT community, and a rigidly single issue political climate. These many pressures were, perhaps, not at the forefront of Vienna’s mind when she walked into a room of attendees ready to accord her “exceptional transsexual” status, hoping that she would articulate a vision of incorporation that could dovetail with the kind of corporate homonormativity that brought them together. As she later reflected in a blog post on the progressive queer website The Bilerico Project, Vienna chose to demand solidarity instead of quietly asking for charity.

Without perhaps as much intentionality as she later wished for, Vienna accepted the invitation, and gave a speech very similar to a speech she had previously given at the state capital on Lobby Day, an event organized by OutFront Minnesota, the statewide LGBT rights organization. In the Lobby Day speech, Vienna critiqued the push for marriage – which had brought much of the assembled audience to the capitol that day – and urged them to instead embrace a broader movement for justice that recognized that for trans youth, issues of poverty, homelessness, and policing are much more pressing than marriage. In that Lobby Day speech on the steps of the statehouse, Vienna said:

Your equality is linked strongly with my liberation as a queer trans woman. And I need your solidarity in demanding justice for my community. When you ask for your marriage to be legally recognized, remember to ask for incarcerated young trans women of color's healthcare needs to be legally recognized. Make the connection clear in your mind, because if you achieve equality with this racist, transphobic ruling class,

you have assimilated into my enemy. You have left a sea of bodies in your hurried wake.³¹⁹

On that day, the wildly positive audience and viral social media response elevated TYSN's profile and cemented Vienna's reputation as a speaker that often pushed a mainstream LGBT crowd just to the edge of comfort, allowing them to feel connected to and a part of more radical work. Perhaps thinking that this would be more of the same, Vienna prepared a very similar speech for the Quorum luncheon. In it, instead of imploring the assembled crowd to connect marriage equality to issues of homelessness and policing, she again asked for "solidarity," asking that they connect their advocacy for employee non-discrimination policies in the workplace to a similar project to address the disproportionate impact of the prison "workhouse" on trans people, and further to fight for those who are locked out of above-ground economies and heavily policed for their participation in or proximity to underground economies.

Perhaps if she had left it there, that audience – much more mainstream, much more corporate – could have left with a sort of patronizing indulgence for the young radical. However, Vienna went on in her speech to connect these issues with the corporate practices of the audience's main funding sponsor, the Minneapolis-based multinational food and agriculture conglomerate Cargill. Vienna cited examples of Cargill's anti-worker policies, their reliance on trafficked child labor, and the devastating forest loss their palm oil extraction practices have caused in Indonesia. "Our struggles are bound together," she told them. Vienna reflected on the oft-critiqued dynamic in which HRC's corporate equality index uses a rigidly single-issue framework for evaluating corporate "gay-friendliness" while ignoring their abuses of people – of all sexualities – in

³¹⁹ Vienna Stanton, Out Front Lobby Day Speech, April 24th, 2011.

the Global South. Speaking to an audience of gays and lesbians who were granted access to corporate “success,” who have become cheerleaders for the corporations for which they work, and who have translated that corporate access into non-profit board positions, major donor status, and community praise, Vienna’s speech was experienced as a slap in the face.

The fallout was swift and fierce. Immediately, TYSN received calls for Vienna’s resignation, and for a formal apology to Quorum. One letter we received stated:

Though I have not been involved with your organization, I had heard some good things about TYSN. Upon completion of my transition, this is exactly the kind of organization I was looking to support by taking an active role. Further I brought with me to the National Coming Out Day luncheon those from my company who are responsibly for financially supporting organizations such as yours. I think it’s safe to say they will NOT be supporting TYSN anytime soon.³²⁰

She concluded by calling for Vienna’s ouster: “I hope you are replaced and TYSN is able to repair its reputation.”³²¹ Quorum issued a public apology to their attendees and to Cargill, distancing itself from TYSN. They wrote:

A very anti-business speech was delivered at the National Coming Out Day luncheon that attacked not only our presenting sponsor, Cargill, but also all corporations, ... and those who work in business in general. This speech was not only completely against the spirit of the luncheon but also against the principles of inclusion that Quorum as an organization believes in. ... Going forward we will not only use a strengthened and enhanced vetting process for all event speakers, including the requirement of a signed contract, we will also be more thoughtful with our community involvement. We hope that you can accept our sincerest apologies for not appropriately and effectively representing our membership and the spirit of NCOD.³²²

³²⁰ Email received by TYSN board, October 10, 2011.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² Quorum Facebook page, October 19, 2011.

The TYSN board posted a response to this letter, supporting Vienna’s speech, reinforcing that Vienna represented TYSN’s values and mission to fight for racial, social, and economic justice, but internally there was considerable discussion – not about the content of the speech itself, but about the strategy of waging this conflict. Randy recalls:

People all over community were freaking out about it. I remember having a profound sense of pride that someone in our community was willing to say fuck it I don't need your money, and this is the principle on which I stand. And I remember thinking that if every non-profit did that it would be like if every accused criminal refused to cop a plea – it would just bring the system down. And at the same time, as someone [who is] a part of an organization with the word trans in the title it caused people to not want to do business. And so on my board, for the organization I work for, they were like “we shouldn’t work with TYSN.” One board member said: “I don’t even know why we are trusting you right now” and I felt like that was a direct pushback because I am brown skinned, I am lower income, and I have a direct affiliation with TYSN, and with Vienna.³²³

Throughout the ensuing conversations, everyone involved with TYSN shared Vienna’s analysis, shared her anti-capitalist critique, and supported her personally. I remember reading the text of her speech and thinking, “Right on. I’m so proud to be working alongside this person.” The questions that emerged for the board were two-fold: first, could we have been more intentional in taking this on? Why did Vienna even accept the invitation? Why are we as trans people so grateful to be asked to speak anywhere that we agree to speak at an event that in no way matches up with our mission? In our conversations we reflected on the internalized transphobia and trauma that has caused us as an organization, and many of us personally, to agree to share our stories with all sorts of people and spaces that actually do us harm – whether giving workshops to medical students or social workers, or agreeing to speak to groups who only want us to share our “personal stories,” but not give a training and have to acknowledge us as experts. We

³²³ Randy, Interview with Author, April, 2014.

reflected on how we participated in our own exploitation by allowing ourselves to be devalued, by repeatedly providing trainings for organizations that had no intentions of actually changing their exclusionary policies, but want to say they had “a training” on these issues. We further discussed the differential way the trauma of these trainings and speaking engagements is felt; I as a white trans-masculine academic am often asked to speak as an expert on trans issues, despite the fact that it is not actually my area of research, whereas young trans people of color, especially trans feminine people, are asked to share their personal stories, as if they are oddities to be understood, or perhaps their “wisdom” – which is very different than expertise.

The second question we discussed had to do with our own reliance on corporate money. Although many of the angry letters threatened to withhold some promise of future funding, the reality was that TYSN had never and would never be funded by any of the wealthy patrons in that room. We are, however, proximate to that funding, funded by people and organizations that profit from that wealth. One of our most longstanding funders, and certainly the one with whom we have the closest relationship, does benefit from numerous ties to corporate wealth. PFund Foundation, the local LGBT community foundation, has funded TYSN at the level of \$5,000-\$10,000 nearly every year since its inception. A community foundation, as opposed to a family or corporate foundation that has an endowment, PFund must raise all of the money it gives away in the form of grants, which makes it uniquely reliant on wealthy gay donors and corporate sponsors. To my knowledge they’ve never had Cargill as an event sponsor, although they have had Target, Wells Fargo, Medtronic, General Mills, RBC Wealth Management, and other, equally culpable, corporate sponsors. I would further imagine that if they could get Cargill as

a sponsor, they wouldn't turn them away. And we absolutely rely on that \$10,000 to pay Vienna's salary.

While TYSN fielded its share of angry emails, that anger did not translate into a direct financial impact, since it wasn't actually funded by those individuals in the first place. But an interview with Nora, PFund's Executive Director at that time, puts this instance into a broader context. She described how "one of the very first conversations I had with a major donor when I started with PFund, was straight-up, 'why is PFund giving grants to transsexuals, because that has nothing to do with gay communities?'"³²⁴ She went on, "It shocked the shit out of me, but over time, I became aware of the tokenizing of the T, and for white gay men - and to some degree white lesbians - who had successfully navigated the straight world in terms of passing, economic success, social power, anything connected to the T made them too faggot-y."³²⁵ Here she named the degree to which proximity to trans bodies and issues threatens the project of mainstreaming and, relatedly, to the philanthropic stance itself - a key issue to which I will return.

Nora went on to describe the immediate impact the speech had on their funding base:

The first call we got was within the first week, from a donor, who called to ask if we did indeed fund TYSN, and they wanted to lodge a complaint because they felt that the speech was disrespectful to the hosts, it set the movement back decades and it had taken Quorum years to build a relationship with Cargill and she had spit in their face. ... There was a mix of phone calls and emails, not that many people who were directly furious, although a few who were really livid. Just rage. Most of it is "I'm no longer in alignment with PFund's values if they fund TYSN." Some people were trying to be rational, saying, "you know TYSN is never going

³²⁴ Nora, Interview with Author, April 2014.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

to get funding from any of the people in that room.” We lost a lot of donors. Well, I’m not sure a lot, two donors who were major donors, one of our founders, and one who was in the process of setting up a scholarship.³²⁶

Vienna’s speech was more than simply a critique of the corporatizing of the LGBT movement, it challenged the philanthropic system on which the entire non-profit system rests, and further, the social “good-ness” of wealthy donors. Cargill is a *major* local funder. It is the largest privately held company in the US in terms of revenue, leaving enormous wealth in the hands of the Cargill family. Their personal and corporate wealth has meant that they are often the white whale of local funding; having Cargill as the funding sponsor for the NCOD luncheon was presumably a major coup for Quorum, the product of years of donor cultivation: at last the vast Cargill wealth would finally be turned towards LGBT issues.

For Vienna, however, the tokenism and erasure of the space of the NCOD luncheon was galling. And further, in the context of that time period, in which enormous amounts of money had begun to flow into the campaign to legalize gay marriage in Minnesota – a sum that eventually totaled more than \$10 million – the profound impact of that sort of single-issue politics on trans communities of color could not go unremarked upon. She reflected,

When I got to the Hilton, I got that I was about to be the asshole. ...I could have just walked out, but I felt really strongly about how those dynamics have played out over my lifetime and how horrible it is to go from not having enough [then] into a banquet room. Banquet rooms are just a really triggering space for me because ... I’ve never been in a space like that without being a token: the token homeless youth, the token trans person, it just never felt authentic. ... I’m sick of sitting in the corner filling my pockets with bread rolls, I’m gonna get on stage and tell the enemy, or

³²⁶ *Ibid*

who I perceived as the enemy as I got more and more standoffish, ...
'cause that feels worth it.³²⁷

In our conversations about the letter we would write in response to Quorum's demand for an apology, we discussed Quorum's expectation that TYSN would have been so grateful for the invitation and so desirous of the money in the pockets of the audience members that Vienna would have comported herself exactly as she clearly had done in that past, metaphorically, if not literally, "filling her pockets with bread rolls." Many in the group who had come up through social services, including Vienna, described their experiences being trotted out to share their stories at the yearly gala of whatever shelter or social service they relied upon. They described being dressed in borrowed clothing, watching other attendees gorge on catered meals and open bars, while they went back to the shelter for their dinner. This dynamic, which is intended to make wealthy donors feel good about how they are "saving the children" and thus encourage them to donate even more, comes at a cost. While it certainly raises money, it also is pedagogical; it entrenches and performs the relationship of power that the social service system relies upon and enforces.

That moment of truth-telling came at an immediate cost, however. When we met as a board to respond to the emails following the event, Vienna was clearly concerned we would be angry, perhaps even that we would follow that advice in those emails and ask for her resignation. She recalls,

In the moment, especially when Quorum called for my resignation, I though "I've pushed too hard with the wrong people, and I've jeopardized the sustainability of our organization." I was freaking the fuck out because here was this group of people who could have squashed us, especially

³²⁷ Vienna, Interview with Author, March 2014.

because I didn't feel like we had a party line about economic justice, so I took on Goliath but I left my slingshot in my other pants.³²⁸

She notes here that TYSN, at that time, did not have a clear approach to its economic justice work. It was clearly a shared value, but there was little clarity about what that value meant in practice and how it informed decisions about organizational partnerships, what funding to go after, or even how we would hire consultants and grant writers.

Vienna went on to reflect that, if not for the NCOD speech, “we would have and could have built a lot of inroads with employee groups at major corporations. So one of the consequences is that we can't get funding from those folks. And it does stand out, given our funding, that we don't get money from employee groups.”³²⁹

This episode is a revealing one. It illustrates the lack of capacity and seat-of-the-pants organizing that characterizes TYSN, both for good and for ill. But it also teaches us larger lessons about trans bodies' proximity to funding wealth and the impact of that proximity on those bodies, as well as on the philanthropic stance itself. Trans bodies of color are threatening to the project of mainstreaming, bringing with them, as they do, the specters of poverty and homelessness, policing and criminalization. TYSN understands itself to be a response to the war waged against trans women of color in the U.S., and on that basis it carries that violence, that fear, and that anger with it. The single-issue politics of homonormativity could perhaps incorporate Vienna as the exceptional white transsexual, the kind of homonationalist subject Jasbir Puar describes. The proximity to Cargill, the possibility of funding from employee groups was what Ana Agathangelou, Tamara Spira, and M. Daniel Bassichis refer to as the “promise project” of

³²⁸ *Ibid*

³²⁹ *Ibid*

homonormativity. “It is precisely these affective economies,” they argue, “that are playing out as gay and lesbian leaders celebrate their own newfound equality only through the naturalization of those who truly belong in the grasp of state captivity, those whose civic redemption from the category of sodomite or criminal has not been promised/offered.”³³⁰ As trans issues increasingly receive mainstream coverage, the pressure to adapt to this homonationalist narrative will only increase.

The Trans Funding Vanguard

This struggle over the incorporation of trans bodies and issues into the project of mainstreaming is aptly illustrated by the recent announcement of, and then backlash against, a call for proposals offered by UCLA’s Palm Center to study trans military service. This initiative is funded by a 1.35 million dollar grant from Col. Jennifer Natalya Pritzker, an heir to the Hyatt hotel fortune, through her personal foundation, the Tawani Fund. Reaction was mixed; while this is the largest single philanthropic gift ever to support trans issues, many activists are frustrated that it will support something that benefits so few trans people, people who might name rampant criminalization, exclusion from legal employment, and poverty as much more pressing issues.

In a recent interview on this new funding, scholar and activist Dean Spade noted that “military service is [not] the most pressing concern facing trans populations or the thing trans people want most. It is because one very wealthy individual has picked this issue and is funding advocacy about it — putting more money toward trans military

³³⁰ Anna Agathangelou, M. Daniel Bassichis, Tamara Spira, “Intimate Investments: Homonormativity, Global Lockdown, and the Seduction of Empire.” *Radical History Review* Issue 100 (Winter 2008). P. 122.

inclusion than is currently devoted to any other trans issue.”³³¹ Spade goes on to say that it is not only a waste of money, it is actually a danger to trans movements for justice that have been working for years on the local and national level. Instead, he states, “as the Pritzker money pushes a national conversation on trans military service, all the red herrings used against trans people will play out in the national media.”³³² Spade foresees a sensationalized national debate over “how trans people use bathrooms and showers, whether government money should pay for gender-related health care, and whether and when we have to report our genital statuses.”³³³ This debate, he argues, will set back efforts to increase access in shelters, schools, and much needed services, and will have a disproportionate effect on trans folks of color for whom those services are a much needed, and yet still inadequate, safety net.

As trans issues become the new vanguard of homonormativity, the project of TYSN becomes even more precarious. In our interview, Harrison reflected on the pressures the faddishness of trans funding places on TYSN’s organizing. He said:

We’ve benefitted from people wanting to fund something trans and looking around and seeing we’re the only option in the Midwest. . . . We’ve been swept up in that wave as everyone wants something from us and it’s been hard to say no, “we’re doing this [instead].” That trajectory is a mainstreaming one, [and so there’s been] this big political tension about who do we train. Do we train cops? Prison guards? Do our work internally to know what our values are? Because we’re always going to be hustling for resources and that puts us at a disadvantage, [which makes it harder to] not get pulled by this growing tide of trans mainstreaming. That’s great but let’s talk about racism and not safer cages for trans folks.³³⁴

³³¹ Chris Geidner, “Meet The Trans Scholar Fighting Against The Campaign For Out Trans Military Service,” *Buzzfeed.com*, September 9, 2013. <http://www.buzzfeed.com/chrisgeidner/meet-the-trans-scholar-fighting-against-the-campaign-for-out>

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ Harrison, Interview with Author, March 2014.

Harrison names the difficulty of charting a path based on political values – or even getting the resources necessary to come together to articulate those values – within a funding system that encourages a much more ameliorative, rights-based politics. Following the national media coverage of CeCe’s incarceration, TYSN has been contacted numerous times about providing trainings to various prisons – one of which was the very prison at which CeCe was incarcerated. In fact, TYSN was approached to provide cultural competency trainings on behalf of the US Department of Justice (DOJ) Community Relations Service.

TYSN’s stance against offering the DOJ trainings was due in large part to how “cultural competence” is used is a pretext to expand policing and incarceration. In their work on the Free CeCe campaign, Vienna and other TYSN members experienced this first hand, with the prosecutor arguing that one two-hour training five years ago made them perfectly able to prosecute a trans woman “fairly.” In a recent email response to the National Center for Transgender Equality describing TYSN’s reasons for declining to participate in the DOJ trainings, Vienna describes the surprisingly reformist sentiment she sees among those being elevated as national trans leaders. At the recent National Transgender Advocacy Convening held by the Arcus Foundation, Vienna, who attended the convening, heard one participant arguing that “the best way for us to support incarcerated trans people was to expand prisons to reduce overcrowding.”³³⁵ As trans issues become the next big thing, the next vanguard of homonormative incorporation,

³³⁵ Personal email correspondence, December 2013.

TYSN having the resources and space to intentionally craft the practice of its vision becomes even more critical.

One key issue with which TYSN must contend is whether or not to become a non-profit. In what follows I explore the dynamics of proximity to the non-profit structure, and the factors that weigh on TYSN's decision whether or not to pursue 501(c)(3) status.

“The Devil’s Tools:” Negotiating Non-Profit Status

There's this idea that institutions need to be perfect, or that we invest so much in institutions out of hopefulness, but the reverse side of that hopefulness is our fear, which entrenches the organizations. Organizations should be assumed to be temporary. Rather than big metal and plastic things, instead, terra cotta jars that naturally erode based on the conditions around them.³³⁶

- Nora

In the years I've been involved with TYSN we have not made a decision about whether to pursue non-profit status. We have begun to have the conversation, in fits and starts, but set it aside as more immediate concerns press in around us. It has felt important that youth have access to as much information as they need to make an informed decision about this question, rather than adults who have had experience in non-profits and access to the critique of the NPIC pushing the conversation. In interviewing my compatriots on the board I discovered there was a great deal more consensus than I had imagined, based on the limited conversations we have had over the years. There was a strong shared distrust of the non-profit structure, although some disagreement about the degree to which we are already implicated in its structure of power even as a fiscally sponsored organization. As I trace the contours of this conversation within TYSN I do so with an

³³⁶ Nora, Interview with Author, April 2014.

eye for the lessons it can offer about the possibility of resisting the co-optation of the NPIC more broadly.

For Kevin, one of the youth Board members, his position is clear: “I don’t think we should. I have a skeptical feeling about non-profits, because non-profits are not created for grassroots organization. It’s about the stipulations that are put on us. Non-profits are motivated by money, grassroots organizations are motivated by the shitty things that happen in community.”³³⁷ Duke, one of the white trans-masculine adult board members who has worked for years as a youth worker, shares Kevin’s assessment. In Duke’s experience, non-profits “just get too big, they lose their mission, their vision, they chase money, and young people get lost.”³³⁸ “I guess I’m biased,” Kevin went on, “it just feels tainted.” What exactly feels tainted, I asked? “The whole process, because we have to almost suck cock to get the money anyway, and a lot of the money has been raised by individuals and weird little events, letters that go out at the end of the year. That just feels better to me.” Duke acknowledges, however, “there’s no security in that though.”³³⁹

The idea of security is raised also by Vienna, who has been perhaps the strongest voice in favor of pursuing tax-exempt status, although she certainly does so with a healthy critique of the NPIC. For Vienna, the decision is about strategy. Vienna was involved with TYSN when it went through the arduous process of separating from its former fiscal sponsor, District 202. Due to the lack of a clear, legally binding contract, District 202 believed TYSN to be its program and wanted the former Director to work shifts in the drop-in. During the separation approximately \$20,000 came under

³³⁷ Kevin, Interview with Author, April 2014.

³³⁸ Duke, Interview with Author, March 2014.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

contention, with each organization believing the money was intended for them. As the fiscal agent, District 202 kept the money. Since then, for Vienna, even though “things are hunky dory with our current fiscal sponsor, I can’t help feeling like the other shoe is going to drop.”³⁴⁰ Vienna expressed that in her estimation, both from her position as a youth member during the separation from District, and now from her position as staff, “ideally I’d like to see those of us who are most connected to the work have legal and financial power.”³⁴¹ Though, she adds, “if there is a fiscal sponsor, [I think it’s important] that we have much deeper understanding so that there’s less risk of it becoming adversarial.”³⁴² Our current fiscal sponsor is a small non-profit with whom we have little in common. AMAZE, our fiscal sponsor, creates anti-bias curriculum for schools and community groups. It has been a pleasant relationship, with little oversight. On the few occasions when AMAZE has been contacted with complaints regarding TYSN – notably following Vienna’s speech at the NCOD luncheon and due to TYSN’s public support for CeCe MacDonald – AMAZE offered their support. To Vienna, however, the question goes beyond security. The non-profit status itself has some allure: “I want to look a little deeper behind the curtain – does it give us more power? Could we adapt those tools? There’s danger that we can’t adapt the tools, we just become a cog in the machine.”³⁴³ Despite being the strongest voice in favor of pursuing 501(c)(3) status, Vienna clearly recognizes the dangers of co-optation.

For Harrison, it is the recognition of that danger itself that is the most important factor. “My gut,” Harrison reflects, “is that I think I would like us to be fiscally

³⁴⁰ Vienna, Interview with Author, March 2014.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ *Ibid*

sponsored by someone else and not be a non-profit. The reality is that many of the things that would be binds [if we were a non-profit] we're already in as a fiscally sponsored organization. I really don't think that it's important to become a non-profit for its own sake."³⁴⁴ There is an option other than non-profit status or remaining fiscally sponsored, however. One option that is always on the table is to create even more distance between us and the constraints of the NPIC by giving up our fiscal sponsorship, thus giving up our ability to receive foundation funding, and become entirely volunteer run. For Harrison, though "[while] there are times I've thought we should consider that just to free us up from how we're getting pulled around by doing that dance, ... I don't actually think that it would be possible for TYSN to be out of the non-profit realm, not getting foundation funding, not having paid staff, just opting out."

For Harrison, like for Logan and Randy, the way forward lies in reckoning with the constraints, recognizing them, and building that awareness into the structure of the organization itself. Harrison articulates this vision:

I think just knowing the traps to look out for. What are the directions it is trying to pull you? Like resisting professionalizing, ... sharing skills, avoiding non-profity shit around martyrdom and churning around at a pace that's about a two or three year grant cycle and not a multi-generational change movement. [Resisting] the momentum around having the end goal being getting the work done you said you'd get done and staying open as opposed to being ready to radically pivot or change shape if you're not getting the kind of change done that you want to. Because non-profits are built to be open stay open and TYSN is built to make deep change in the world, and those are conflicting goals.³⁴⁵

This approach dovetails with the vision expressed by Nora in our interview, in which she offered a vision in which our organizations are simply containers, "assumed to be

³⁴⁴ Harrison, Interview with Author, March 2014.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

temporary.” “Rather than big metal and plastic things,” she says, “instead, terra cotta jars that naturally erode based on the conditions around them.”³⁴⁶ For TYSN, then, its approach to the question of non-profit status is strategic. It is facing many, if not all, of the constraints faced by non-profits already, simply through its reliance on foundation funding. Perhaps there might be additional financial and legal security in the non-profit status, perhaps not. Certainly it would further bind us up in a discursive and material world that is antithetical to the project of sustained, long-term change organizing. Like in most things, as TYSN considers its strategic proximity to the non-profit structure, its most important value is process.

Conclusion: Futurity, Fellowship, and a “Stance of Undefeated Despair”

*Without fellowship they possess and are possessed by social death.*³⁴⁷
- Avery Gordon

In her book *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant describes the affective attachment practices of those trying to survive a “crisis-intensified historical present.”³⁴⁸ Within “crisis time,” she writes, “all must inhabit the shared atmosphere of dehabitation and forced improvisation. ... Their solidarity around surviving this scene and staying attached to life involved gathering up diverse practices for adjusting to the singular and shared present.”³⁴⁹ For the youth of TYSN too, this information trading is a vital survival strategy, a method of staying attached to life when the social forces intending to shorten their life and expose them to death snap at their heels.

³⁴⁶ Nora, Interview with Author, April 2014..

³⁴⁷ Avery Gordon, “The Prisoner’s Curse.” P. 47.

³⁴⁸ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 57.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

At the conclusion of my conversations with my fellow board members and compatriots, I asked them to reflect on why, despite the frustration and the emotional toll, did they stay. I was especially interested in the experiences of youth members, as I understood that like myself, other adult Board members felt strongly that to step away during this period of transition would impose an unfair burden on youth leaders when the organizational structure did not yet fully incorporate and foster their power. But youth members did – and still do – experience such profound disappointment and frustration with the slow pace of change, a pace that demands such material sacrifices and is, in many ways, a betrayal of the values we say we share. Why, despite this, did youth continue to show up, to invest their time, and even more importantly, invest their personhood, their hearts?

For Sophie, the kind of exchange that Berlant describes is a key survival strategy. In her experience with District 202, Sophie observed that “when youth get closer to age out they tend to disappear. Maybe it’s not a bad thing, but there’s no bridge to [close the] gap [between] youth and adults, and get youth who have aged out back in the agency to mentor youth. So the cycle just renews over and over. *What’s learned isn’t transferred.*”³⁵⁰ Sophie clearly craves a space where the vital information-trading that trans women already engage in to keep one another alive is fostered, is supported with the resources that would enable it to become more than a survival strategy, but a life-building strategy, even a movement-building strategy.

Kevin describes a similar attachment. Kevin began at TYSN by “going to open hours, and there were events that I went to, and chances to volunteer so I did. And I was

³⁵⁰ Sophie, Interview with Author, February 2014.

like ‘so there are words that express me!’ So now I want to be around, because I want to vocalize these words that express me that I’ve never had before.”³⁵¹ For Kevin the chance to feel connected to other trans people had a profound effect. “Just being around Randy and Vienna a lot, just everyday conversation, just normalized my internal life.”³⁵² Kevin describes how prior to coming to TYSN he had volunteered at other organizations but felt “really stupid and ignorant” for not understanding the terms that they used to describe their work. “I didn’t know what the term campaign meant, or even organizing. I didn’t understand having a set of demands. [I didn’t understand] why I was angry with so many systems and not even realizing that they were systems.”³⁵³ There is power then in understanding oneself in relationship to others, to the systems that have kept trans youth in isolation, that have kept all of us apart from one another, because in our distance any one of us alone is unable to challenge the systems that make it so.

In my conversation with Kevin I struggled to articulate my final question. Kevin and I had a fraught relationship with one another since the first strategic planning retreat in the fall – at least on my part. I was afraid of his judgment, and I was frustrated that despite the *years* many adults on the Board had worked towards youth leadership it still wasn’t good enough, didn’t work, was tokenizing, had yet to become truly authentic. Really I wanted him to like me, to see me as on his side, which I knew, even as I felt it, diminished and demeaned the profound structural reasons why I could only ever partially be “on his side,” why I would always already exist also as a threat. I asked “what does TYSN mean for you here,” putting my hand on my chest. I didn’t mean in his heart,

³⁵¹ Kevin, Interview with Author, April 2014.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

exactly. I meant in his body, in his sense of himself, in all his vulnerability and strength. He replied, “a sense of community and belonging: that we all struggle, that we all need support, and that when I’m struggling someone is supporting me and when someone else is struggling I’m supporting them.”³⁵⁴

Avery Gordon suggests that a “stance of undefeated despair,” is, in addition to being the “carrying-on-regardless” in the face of profound loss and constant threat, also “a standpoint that guides political movements.”³⁵⁵ Gordon reflects that the fate of those who are imprisoned, or, I would add, socially dead, are bound up with the fates of those of us “not yet captured.”³⁵⁶ It is fellowship, Gordon argues, that keeps us all, both the captured and the not-yet-captured, from “possessing and being possessed by social death.”³⁵⁷ This kind of fellowship is profoundly different than the uncritical fetishization of “community” that so many LGBT non-profits embrace. Instead of the progressive narrative of community, a stance of undefeated despair is a posture that recognizes the cruelty of non-profits, the power embedded within them, the degree to which they discipline us and our movements – and, critically, the necessity of carrying on regardless.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁵ Gordon, “The Prisoner’s Curse,” p. 18.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Conclusion

Even as I complete this dissertation, TYSN is taking a major – and, for me, both terrifying and exciting – step towards youth leadership. Vienna, after more than three years as TYSN’s Executive Director, and after struggling mightily against burnout and exhaustion, has decided to step down. Although we on the board knew her decision was coming, and sincerely want for her to nurture her creativity and heal from the grueling pace and emotional toll of being the single staff of an under-resourced organization, it still, nonetheless, threw us into a bit of a tailspin. Our various assumptions about success and failure, stability and risk, were immediately apparent. Right away I started thinking about messaging and who I would reach out to as we, *of course*, conducted a national search to hire a new Executive Director with youth work and fundraising experience, someone whose identity and politics would foster the kind of youth power we are working towards, over a period of a few years. Logan was right there with me, I think. For Malik, Sophia, and Kevin, however, this could be the moment to put our money where our mouth is, literally. If we say we want to be youth led, they said, then let’s be led by youth, let’s hire the young people we’ve been bringing through the leadership pipeline.

But what about the funders, I fretted? If we lose our funding because the foundations that fund us think TYSN is unstable and not “professional” enough, then hiring youth members is an empty gesture, I argued. Would it not be better to transition to youth leadership over a year or two, and have an interim director, one who conforms at least somewhat to funders’ ideas of what a non-profit Executive Director looks, sounds,

and acts like, and have that person introduce the idea of youth leadership and hand off those relationships with funders in an orderly and planned fashion? Malik was frustrated with me, with funders, with the pressure to conform to expectations. Are we willing to lose funding, Kevin asked? We discussed it as a group. We don't necessarily need to lose funding, I reminded myself. There are lots of small progressive foundations that would be excited to fund the first trans-specific youth-led organization, the only one, we think. And individual donors, too, would be excited to support our vision. Maybe we could find more of those elusive rich radical lesbians? We would need to take advantage of the new national attention TYSN is getting, thanks to Laverne Cox and the Free CeCe campaign. We could use social media and put together a Kickstarter page, so even if we do lose some of our current funding, other people could make up that difference, right? It's worth doing, worth taking a risk, we decided. It's what we believe in. The mission we created together said that we wanted to dream of a different world and get young folks the resources necessary to build it. So let's do it, we said. Kevin, Malik, Sophia, and DJ – all youth members – are now TYSN's new leadership staff, each taking on a different core set of responsibilities: programming, fundraising and communications, finances and operations, and sustainability, accountability, and community relationships.

It still feels risky to me, but I'm self aware enough to know that my sense of risk is a disciplining force, one that has been instilled in me over my years working in non-profits, and it – just as much as losing funding – limits the radical potential of our movements. It is fitting to conclude this project with TYSN's attempt to chart a new course, fraught as it is; in what follows I first explore some of the ways that, like TYSN, other queer organizations are attempting to engage more strategically with the non-

profit form, intentionally resisting the disciplining power embedded in its structural arrangement. I then conclude with a return to compassion, community, capital, and crisis, asking: if not compassion, then what? I explore the liberatory potential in care as an affective posture, and communities of care as a basis for movements.

Resisting the Logics of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex

Dylan Rodriguez argues that it is critical that we “fully comprehend the NPIC *as the institutionalization of a relation of dominance.*”³⁵⁸ Although there are specific tactics that organizations are utilizing to resist the disciplining power of the non-profit, some of which I will discuss below, at their core each strategy involves a re-orientation, away from capital, away from a neoliberal system of valuation and common sense which has been deeply incorporated into the non-profit structure: values that promote the continued existence of *organizations* at the expense of *movements*, an infrastructure that prioritizes major donors over basebuilding, and that individualizes systemic crisis.

For example: if TYSN does lose funding, what then? What if TYSN does “fail?” Would that really be a failure? At a recent conference on the impact of the NPIC on queer movements, a conference organized by Dean Spade and Urvashi Vaid, one of the overarching themes was our over-investment in, and over-reliance on, particular organizations, rather than an investment in and reliance on the *movement*.³⁵⁹ Again and again, attendees and panelists reiterated that organizations are *not* the movement. They can be tools or containers, but movements are made up of people, not organizations.

There is a danger in conflating organizations with movements. Instead of building

³⁵⁸ Dylan Rodriguez, “The Political Logic of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex,” p. 39.

³⁵⁹ “Queer Dreams, Non-Profit Blues” Plenary. New York, January 27, 2013

organizations, we need to focus on building movements, and to do that we must focus on building activists. When particular organizations have served their purpose, activists work in other spaces and with other tools. Even if TYSN ceases to exist next year or in five years, Kevin, Sophia, Malik, DJ and all of the other trans young folks of color who come up through TYSN's political education programming will still *be* the movement, and the fellowship and solidarity they have with one another is, ultimately, more important than the particular organizational container.

I know this intellectually, but my heart is still attached to *TYSN* specifically, as well as to Kevin, Malik, Sophia, DJ and the other youth leaders. Even though I know that it's okay, even good, for particular organizations to fade away when they have served their purpose – to be terra cotta pots, as Nora says – the idea of losing TYSN causes me great grief. This is, in part, because when organizations fold, it is not usually because they have “served their purpose.” It is almost always because they lost their funding, and I know that their staff end up scrambling for another low-paying non-profit job, and the people with whom they worked, the people who relied on that organization – whether for services or solidarity – are now more isolated and precarious. In the past year, key movement organizations have folded, organizations like Queers for Economic Justice and the Young Women's Empowerment Project, central figures leading the left edge of queer movements. Neither one had finished “serving their purpose,” although they certainly served *a* purpose, and would have continued doing so were it not for the criminalization and policing experienced by the members of both organizations, poor queer and trans people of color. Although certainly the activists who were a part of both of those organizations are infinitely stronger as organizers for their work in those spaces, the

amount of energy taken up by scrambling for, and often losing, funding is incalculable.

At the conference I mentioned above, aptly titled “Queer Dreams and Non-Profit Blues,” Urvashi Vaid noted one of the structural reasons for these closures, one illustrated by each of the examples in this dissertation: neoliberal policies have had a paradoxical effect, decreasing funding while simultaneously increasing demand. And this precarity is disciplining not just to the people who rely on those services, but on the movement organizers who must scramble to provide them. As I have argued, precarity is a key technology of neoliberal governance; when people are struggling with precarity, they are not struggling with the state, they are not – do not have the time or the energy – to make revolutionary demands. Dean Spade argues that the NPIC is a “containment strategy,” a carrot to the stick of “COINTELPRO, surveillance, police violence, and criminalization.”³⁶⁰

Some activists argue that we must simply refuse the NPIC. That the non-profit form is irredeemably damaging, rooted as it is in white supremacist capitalism. Those scholars and activists call for an autonomous grass-roots movement, peopled wholly by volunteer activists, and sustained by anti-capitalist collective economic communities. This, they imagine, could produce the kind of global solidarity that is currently missing on the left. Others, however, focus their critique on the profound power of private philanthropy and argue that instead of doling out paltry grants at a rate of 5%, those foundations should simply be taxed at the rate that individuals are taxed. Those billions of dollars in increased tax revenue could easily meet the basic needs of people living in poverty, freeing up progressive organizations to focus on social change. I believe this

³⁶⁰ Dean Spade, comments at “Queer Dreams, Non-Profit Blues” Plenary. January 27, 2013.

approach is short-sighted for at least two reasons: a) it ignores the fact that increased money would not necessarily be spent on creating a welfare state – that change would require the pressure of a social movement, and b) it romanticizes the history of the welfare state in the US, which was not, even when it was somewhat robust, all that egalitarian. Given the political economic realities of contemporary capitalism, the non-profit system is a tool we simply cannot afford to let go of. But there are strategies to reduce its harm.

Some organizations, like Southerners on New Ground (SONG), which is committed to building a “multi-issue southern justice movement,” use a membership structure in order to shift the power away from major donors and foundations and towards its actual constituency. At SONG, members give at least fifteen dollars annually, or provide some kind of in-kind donation or service in lieu of cash, and participate in political education and basebuilding work. SONG, “also look[s] to our members for more than money. We need folks to actively participate in stopping cycles of violence, oppression, deceit, and isolation. We look to our members to commit to the life-long process of being anti-racist, gender liberationists, truth-tellers and healers.”³⁶¹

Membership-based structures are intended to reduce the power that foundations and wealthy donors have on the mission and programs of an organization by shifting the burden of funding from a few major sources to hundreds or thousands of small donors.

Other organizations operate according to non-hierarchical principles and structures. The Sylvia Rivera Law Project (SRLP) makes decisions using a collective structure, in which each area of the organization’s work, from direct legal services to

³⁶¹ <http://southernersonnewground.org/become-a-member/songs-membership-structure> 33

fundraising is coordinated by a collective of community members. An advisory board of incarcerated people also guides their work in order to increase transparency and accountability. According to SRLP, their structure is intended to “support work that aims to redistribute power and wealth for a more just society. We also strongly believe that our community-based structure, which maximizes community involvement, will support the sustainability of our work and the accountability of SRLP to its constituency.”³⁶² SRLP has also made their collective structure handbook available on their website so that other organizations can modify and replicate their structure to suit their own purposes.

Communities United Against Violence (CUAV) in San Francisco has also adopted a non-hierarchical model, and has shifted their organizational structure to accommodate a flat pay scale across the organization, a move intended to resist the professionalization of anti-violence activism that over-values skills like fundraising and administration. One of the country’s first LGBT anti-violence organizations, founded in 1979, CUAV has had, for most of its history, a fairly traditional non-profit structure, and one that prioritized issues common to the mainstream LGBT anti-violence movement: hate crimes legislation, police sensitivity training, legal assistance, peer support, and a crisis hotline. In 2007, in response to pressure from queer and trans activists of color, the organization began a process to re-evaluate its structure in order to enable intersectional politics and an analysis of systemic violence. They write: “ at this powerful juncture in our history we transitioned to a shared leadership staff structure and integrated our long-

³⁶² <http://srlp.org/our-strategy/collective-structure/>

standing support services with opportunities for LGBTQ survivors to develop their leadership and organize to address the root causes of violence.”³⁶³

TYSN, as well as many other organizations nationally, including FIERCE in New York, recognize the necessity of crafting a board that is reflective of the community most impacted by the issues the organization addresses. For TYSN, this means that the majority of the Board must be trans people, young people, and people of color. This approach intentionally resists the pressure to have a board composed of those with greatest access to wealth.

Andrea Smith has called for activists in the US to approach non-profits similarly to the Zapatistas and other Global South revolutionary movements: as a tool. “Elsewhere in the world,” Smith argues, “organizers still use non-profits, but they aren’t the movement, and they are accountable towards the movement.”³⁶⁴ Smith argues that non-profits can be used strategically as mechanisms to funnel money towards grassroots movements. She critiques the “politics of purity” that rejects the non-profit form entirely, arguing that there is no pure space outside of capitalism. These small decisions matter, the strategic approach is critical. It does not fully undermine the power of the state and private philanthropy, but it enables, at least to some degree, possibility.

Communities of Care Articulated Through a Critique of Capitalism

There is thus a particular historical urgency in the current struggle for new vernaculars that disarticulate the multilayered, taken-for-granted state practices of punishment, repression, and retribution from common notions of justice, peace, and the good society. Arguably, it is this difficult

³⁶³ <http://www.cuav.org/history/>

³⁶⁴ Andrea Smith, comments at “Queer Dreams, Non-Profit Blues” Conference. January 27, 2013.

*and dangerous work of disarticulation, specifically the displacement of a powerful, socially determinant “law and order” common sense, that remains the most undertheorized dimension of contemporary struggles for social transformation.*³⁶⁵

- Dylan Rodriguez

*Progressive movements would be well served by articulating themselves through a critique of capitalism.*³⁶⁶

- Miranda Joseph

The power in each of the strategies Rodriguez and Joseph suggest is that they take seriously both the *specific* powers embedded in the non-profit form, and the cultural logics that naturalize the relationship between the non-profit and neoliberal capitalism. Further, they resist the cultural narrative that positions non-profits as good, as neutral, as empty vessels. These cultural logics, the most important of which I've argued are compassion and community, articulate the “relation of dominance” that Dylan Rodriguez describes. Compassion, as I've shown, is an affective stance that understands suffering to be fundamentally individual, and positions the compassionate one as outside the relations producing suffering. In this way, compassion has been and remains a disciplining tool of governance focused on behavior, moral posture, and coerced submission to low-wage capitalism. Alongside this, community works as an affirmative, rather than strictly disciplinary, tool of governance, in which we are invited and induced to come to desire neoliberal capitalism. Neither posture is intended to disrupt the relations of dominance that produce crisis.

³⁶⁵ Dylan Rodriguez, “The Political Logic of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex,” p. 37.

³⁶⁶ Miranda Joseph, p. xxxi.

So what then? Should we not feel compassion towards the suffering of others? Should we not desire the connection and solidarity of community? I wonder if there is potential instead in *care*, and specifically in communities of care, with close attention to their orientation towards capital. Compassion is a feeling, and though it can inspire action, the available actions exist within a carefully truncated range. Care, on the other hand, bears no such distinction between feeling and action. Its activity is not structured by the same disciplining power as that of compassion. It can be passionate – grief, concern, hope, connection, rage - and it can invite an expansive range of actions. I take my example from the communities of care that queer folks created to grapple with the crisis of AIDS; communities that provided care for one another, but that also *cared*: were angry, rageful, in fact, at the injustices that produced that crisis. There was a sense of essential continuity between the every-day urgent tasks of caring for one another and the work of systems change: both were necessary and one was not possible without the other. It was the uncritical adoption of, and absorption into, the non-profit apparatus that shifted that care into compassion, as the example of Howard Brown’s quest for a “fundable” AIDS narrative illustrates. And of course a necessary aspect of the shift to compassion was the loss of directed anger, the loss of systemic political work, since a critique of the moral and economic system in which donors are invested would jeopardize that funding.

This suggests another critical aspect of communities of care: the articulation of those communities *through* a critique of capitalism. My rejection of both compassion and an uncritical embrace of community is that neither affective stance *works* to address ongoing and intensifying social crisis, in particular because neither is intended to disrupt neoliberal capitalism. In order for communities of care to address social crisis, they

must name and resist capitalism. This type of community cannot, then, be organized (solely) around identity. Many of my informants reflected that in their experience with organizations, the same people tended to turn up at various non-profits. Many of the people now involved with TYSN, for instance, had been previously involved in District 202. This reminds us that these organizations are, fundamentally, made up of people. I wonder what our movement would be like if we invested as much, emotionally and materially, in building communities of care with one another, as we do in maintaining non-profits. Communities of care, which can exist alongside, can overlap with, and can exceed particular non-profit arrangements, can be the stuff of movements in a way that non-profits themselves cannot.

Caring: A “Stance of Undefeated Despair”

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that our investment in non-profits is an example of what Lauren Berlant calls “cruel optimism:” in which the object of our desire is actually a barrier to our flourishing. Despite the investment and struggle and desire and frustration of so many queer organizers, the non-profit form, as each site I’ve considered amply illustrates, is designed to maintain and intensify social crisis rather than ameliorate it. However, simply naming our attachment to the non-profit form as a relation of cruel optimism doesn’t actually make the optimism, the desire, less necessary for our continued survival. But of course, our optimism isn’t for the non-profits themselves, or at least it doesn’t need to be. The underlying affective desires – for connection, for solidarity, for love, for a respite from fear – can be met within communities of care.

One important dynamic illustrated by the example of the communities of care that arose in response to the AIDS crisis has to do with the role of despair. My initial impetus to study non-profits came from my need to grapple with the desperate sadness I saw all around me in queer non-profits, from participants and clients, but especially from staff. In interviews, however, I was reminded that it was not the sadness itself that was the issue – the sadness made perfect sense, in response to the pain we could do nothing, truly, to mitigate. Instead, what was crazy-making, both for me and for the majority of those I interviewed, was the individualized narrative *about* that sadness that operates within non-profits. We had trainings about how to manage “vicarious trauma,” or my favorite, “*compassion fatigue*.” The solution was always more and better “self-care,” as if the cause of our sadness was a failure to meditate and take soothing baths. This is, of course, a perfectly neoliberal response, but it illustrates an important lesson: the answer lies not in happiness, or in connection, or even in *feeling better*. Again, I am brought back to the stance of undefeated despair. Jose Muñoz writes that for marginalized people, melancholia is not, as Freud has said, pathological. The refusal to let go of a loss is, for Muñoz, politically enabling.³⁶⁷ For Muñoz, melancholia is a “mechanism that helps us (re)construct identity and take our dead with us to the various battles we must wage in their names – and in our names.”³⁶⁸ For Judith Butler, too, grief can be politically enabling; grief “furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for

³⁶⁷ Jose Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility.”³⁶⁹ This kind of political grief must animate communities of care that articulate themselves through a critique of capitalism. Unlike compassion, which imagines suffering to be *over there*, and community, which beckons us to love the very systems that produce that suffering, a stance of undefeated despair recognizes that in response to the state of ongoing social crisis we must carry on regardless, making do, carving out a livable life and the possibility of something different.

³⁶⁹ Judith Butler, *Precarious Lives: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004), p. 22.

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